

RODNEY the OVERSEER

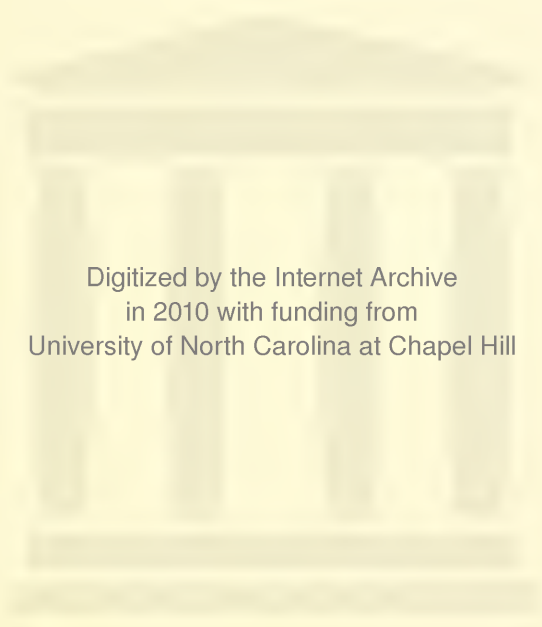
HARRY
CASTLEMAN



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THE GUNBOAT'S REPLY TO THE HOME GUARDS.

CASTLEMON'S WAR SERIES.

RODNEY, THE OVERSEER

BY

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Four Illustrations by Geo. G. White.



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RODNEY, THE OVERSEER.

CHAPTER I.

A DISGUSTED HOME GUARD.

“I DON’T say that you fellows played the part of cowards by firing into that unarmed boat, but you acted like born idiots, and it would serve you just right if the citizens of Baton Rouge should come out here in a body and lynch the last one of you. Why do you not wait for orders from me instead of roaming about the country acting on your own responsibility? I know what the Confederacy expects this company to do and you don’t.”

“Now jest listen at you, Tom Randolph.”

“Yes, listen when your commanding officer speaks, and remember that there is a handle to my name and that I expect you to use it as often as you address me.”

“ Well, *Cap'n* Randolph, if that suits you any better ; though it's mighty little you ever done to deserve the title. When this company of ourn was first got up didn't you say that we was going to make all the Union men about here hunt their holes ? ”

“ Yes, I did ; and I would have done it in a soldier-like manner if you had obeyed my orders, as you promised to do when you were sworn into the service. But when you made up your minds that you knew more than your captain and set out to have your own way, you got yourselves into hot water directly, and I am very glad of it. If you have come to your senses and will promise that from this time on you will obey my orders to the letter, and quit going off on raids unless I send you, I will do the best I can for you ; but the minute you take the bits in your teeth, as you have been doing for the last few months, that minute I will throw you over and the conscript officer can take you and welcome. And mark my words, this is the last warning I shall give you. The last one of you ought to be court-martialled and shot.”

It was a motley group of men and boys, perhaps a score of them in all, who were gathered at the foot of the wide steps that led up to the front door of Mr. Randolph's plantation house, and one could have told at a glance that they were as excited and angry as was the young officer in Confederate uniform on the gallery above, who shook his fists at them over the railing, and addressed them in the imperious language we have just recorded. The most of the group were dressed like soldiers, and that was what they claimed to be ; but whether they belonged to the Union or Confederate army it would have been hard to tell, for their clothing was an odd mixture of the uniforms of both. It would have been quite as hard to tell whether they belonged to the artillery, infantry, or cavalry, for the distinguishing colors of these three branches of the service were about equally represented. These men and boys called themselves Home Guards ; and they were members of the independent company that Tom Randolph and his father raised and equipped after Tom failed to get himself elected second lieutenant of

Captain Hubbard's Rangers. You remember something about that, do you not ?

When the war excitement was at its height in the spring of 1861, and Rodney Gray, Marcy Gray's cousin, left the military academy at Barrington because he could not study while others were going into the Southern army and making ready to fight for the cause in which they honestly believed, he was bound by a compact he had made with some other red-hot rebels in his class to enlist within twenty-four hours after he reached home provided he could get to a recruiting office in that time. The uniform he wore at school was gray, and so was the one adopted by those who were determined to break up the government because they could no longer do as they pleased with it ; and impulsive Rodney Gray, carried away by the excitement of the hour, declared that he would not wear any other color until the South had gained her independence. He found it easy to keep the first part of his promise, for it so happened that he came home in time to join an independent company of cavalry that was being raised in his immediate neigh-

borhood, and which was intended to be so very select that no applicant could get into the company if a single member of it objected to him.

Among the prominent citizens of Mooreville who took a deep interest in the organization (they all claimed Mooreville as their home, although some of them lived from three to a dozen miles outside of it), and used both money and influence to help it along, was Mr. Randolph, Tom's father. If any young fellow who stood well in the community hesitated to send in his name because he could not raise money enough to buy a horse and fit himself out as well as the other Rangers were fitted out, Mr. Randolph was prompt to come to his aid with the assurance that if he would go ahead and enlist, money need not stand in his way, for the horse, uniform, weapons, and all other necessary things would be forthcoming. He scoured the country for miles around for recruits, and did so much in other ways to aid the company that when the Rangers made their first camp, and hoisted above it the flag under which they hoped to ride to victory, they named it Camp Randolph.

This gentleman was so rabid a Secessionist that he was utterly unreasonable. In fact, some of his warmest friends declared that he was about half crazy. He had no clearer conception of the sufferings and trials that he and those who believed as he did were bringing upon the people of the South than the most ignorant negro on his plantations. The men of the North belonged to an inferior race and did not know how to fight. They were going to be whipped without any trouble at all, and when the Southern troops had covered themselves with glory by taking and holding Washington, while Jefferson Davis dictated terms of peace to the Lincoln hirelings, he wanted all the Mooreville boys there to witness the grand and imposing spectacle, and that was why he urged them to enlist. That was about what Mr. Randolph said, and no doubt he was honest with himself as well as with the recruits he brought into Captain Hubbard's company ; but events proved that he had another object in view and one that he did not think it best to speak of.

Tom Randolph, who was twenty-four years of age, was as conceited an ignoramus as there

was in that part of Louisiana ; but he had an idea that he was very bright, and capable of filling any office he could get. At first he declared his intention of going to the front as captain of the Rangers. It would be no more than right that he should have the highest place in return for what his father had done for the company ; but when Mr. Randolph told him that *that* would be aiming a little too high, that Bob Hubbard, who had really done more hard work for the company than anybody else, would certainly be chosen captain, and that it would look better and be better if Tom would accept something a little lower down and work his way up, the young man decided that he would be a candidate for the second lieutenant's place. He was sure he would get it and so was his father ; but he didn't. Although the Rangers did not know anything about soldiering, they *did* know what sort of men they wanted for officers, and Tom received but twelve votes out of sixty-five—his own and those of the eleven recruits his father had brought into the company. Then there was trouble in the camp, and if Tom and his father

had possessed the physical power they would have thrashed every Ranger in it. But there was one thing about it : if they could not have a voice in the management of the company they would not only cease to support it, but would do their best to break it up ; and Tom acted upon this rule or ruin policy by withdrawing from the ranks almost as soon as the result of the ballot was announced, his example being followed by the eleven recruits who had voted for him.

“Now let’s see how they will get on with their Partisan Rangers,” Tom said to his father that night. “There’s almost too much social equality in that company anyway to suit me. I have noticed it ever since I have been in it. Who is their second lieutenant, the man they shoved into my place ? A common book-keeper who never in his life had the price of a pickaninny in his pocket.”

Tom hoped and believed that by withdrawing from the company he had inflicted a blow upon it from which it would never recover ; but to his surprise and disgust the Rangers went ahead with their plans as if nothing had

happened. Rodney Gray, the only member of the organization who knew anything about military matters, was made first duty sergeant and drill-master; and under his skilful management the Rangers changed so rapidly from awkward greenhorns to soldiers, and became so proficient in the school of the company, that the deserters, with the single exception of Tom Randolph himself, began to repent their hasty action, and ask one another what they could do to induce the Rangers to take them back again. They knew they could not look to Mr. Randolph for an outfit, for he took Tom's defeat as a deliberate insult to his family, and instead of promoting enlistments in the company was doing all he could to stop them. The only one they could turn to for help was Rodney Gray's father—a man who had said and done nothing of consequence to show that he was in favor of partisan organizations, and who was looked upon with suspicion by his neighbors because he put no faith in the final success of the secession movement, and did not hesitate to say that the South would be whipped as she deserved to be for

trying to break up the government. There were thousands of wealthy and influential men in Louisiana who believed as he did ; and yet they did more to help the soldiers than the blatant rebels who were fierce for a fight at the beginning, but went over to the Federals at the first opportunity, and became "spies and informers for the sake of the loaves and fishes that fell into their hands." The sequel proved that the recruits went to the right man, for six of the eleven were fitted out at Mr. Gray's expense. And he did not boast of it either, as Mr. Randolph and Tom had done.

Captain Hubbard's Rangers, as the company was always called, got on very well until they began looking around for someone to swear them into the service and order them to the front, and then the trouble began. They first applied to the commanding officer at New Orleans ; but he declined to have anything to do with them unless they would give up their independent organization, and that was something the Rangers were determined they would not do to please anybody. They formed their company in the first place because they were

led to believe that the Richmond government was in full sympathy with such organizations, which would be allowed full liberty of action when sworn into the service of the State; but such would by no means be the case if they permitted themselves to be sworn into the service of the Confederacy. As one of the Rangers expressed it: "If they were going to give their liberty up to a new government they might as well have stayed under the old."

Tom Randolph was delighted when he heard of this state of affairs, and the Rangers themselves were much depressed; but Rodney Gray was sure he saw a way out of the difficulty when he received a letter from his old schoolmate and chum, Dick Graham, who lived in Missouri. In that letter Dick said he belonged to an organization of partisans who were known as State Guards. Their immediate commander was General Price, but they were required to take oath to obey Governor Jackson and nobody else. In plain English this meant that while the State Guards were willing to look out for the secession movement

in Missouri and keep all Yankee invaders off her soil, they did not intend to go into any other State unless they felt like it, or permit the Richmond authorities to control their movements in any way. That was exactly the kind of partisans that Captain Hubbard and his men wanted to be; and when Rodney Gray said that if the Governor of their own State would not accept them as a company, they had a perfect right to offer themselves to the Governor of another, and that it might be a good plan to ask General Price if he would take the Rangers just as they were, Captain Hubbard was glad to act upon the suggestion. So, without delay, a telegram was sent to Dick Graham's father in St. Louis, and in due time the answer came back:

Price will accept. Company officers and independent organization to remain the same.

To quote from Rodney, this brought the matter squarely home to the Rangers, who were compelled to decide upon some course of action without loss of time. A business meeting of the company (and a stormy one it turned

out to be) was held that very day ; and although Captain Hubbard and Rodney carried their point, it was only by a small majority of votes that the Rangers consented to leave their own State and go into the service of another.

Believing it to be a good plan to strike while the iron was hot, Captain Hubbard and one of his officers at once set out for New Orleans to find a boat that would take the company to Little Rock ; but in the meantime the Governor of Louisiana got wind of the affair through spies in the telegraph office in Mooreville, and tried to upset the designs of the Rangers by having them sworn in by General Lacey, who was a Confederate officer. He would have succeeded too had it not been for quick-witted Rodney Gray, who cautioned his comrades not to answer to their names when the roll was called. He did more. When his own name was called he rode to the front and centre and surprised and angered the general, a veteran of the Mexican War, who had never learned to recognize any organizations outside of those mentioned in

the Army Regulations, by stating that the company was an independent one whose members, while willing and eager to be sworn into the service of their State, did not desire to enter the service of the Confederate States. They enlisted as partisans, and partisans they wished to remain. Upon hearing this the veteran was astounded. He declared, by the shade of the great and good Washington, that he did not know what the country was coming to, flung the roll-book on the ground at the feet of Rodney's horse, and rode away in a huff; and that was the last of Captain Hubbard's Rangers. They broke ranks then and there and never held a company meeting afterward.

The next morning Rodney Gray, who was determined to be a partisan and nothing else, started for Missouri with no companion but his horse, and eventually succeeded in finding his friend Graham in spite of all the efforts that were made, both by Union men and rebels, to stop him. Of course Tom Randolph was happy over the way things had turned out, and one would think he ought to have been satisfied;

but he was not. Every one of the Rangers who voted against him when he ran for second lieutenant made an enemy of Tom, and he showed it as often as the opportunity was presented. He felt particularly spiteful toward Rodney Gray, whose services as drill-master had been publicly acknowledged by the gift of an elegant sword from the company, and he began persecuting him the moment he learned that Rodney had decided to leave the State and go to Missouri. With the aid of a friend of his, Drummond by name, who had charge of the telegraph office in Mooreville, he paved the way for Rodney's arrest in St. Louis by sending a description of him and his horse to Mr. Randolph's agent, a Yankee cotton factor, who lived in that city; but this scheme, which might have brought Rodney's soldiering to an end before it was fairly begun, was frustrated by a "student" in Drummond's office whose name was Griffin, and who went all the way to Baton Rouge by night to warn Rodney of the plots that had been laid against him. Acting on his friendly hints Rodney did not go to St. Louis as he had intended, but left the boat at

Cedar Bluff Landing in Missouri ; and from there, after some exciting experiences with a squad of emergency men who happened to come in with a prisoner during the night, he set off across the country to find General Price and Dick Graham.

He had undertaken something from which the boldest man might have shrunk without any fear of being accused of timidity ; but he came through with flying colors as we have said, did a soldier's duty side by side with his friend Dick for fifteen dreary months, was discharged with him at Tupelo after the evacuation of Corinth, and brought Dick home with him to his father's house at Mooreville, where they were both resting at the time this story begins. Even after they were discharged, and had begun telling each other that their troubles and trials as soldiers were all over, they met with an adventure that under almost any other circumstances might have proved a serious thing for them. Shortly after they left Camp Pinckney on their way home, they ran into a squad of Union troopers, who covered them with their carbines and told them to come in out of

the rain. They were prisoners for the first time, but did not remain so any longer than it took their captors to read their discharges. The boys' hearts overflowed with gratitude when the good-natured corporal who commanded the squad jerked his thumb over his shoulder and told them to "git," and Rodney hinted that the time might come when they could repay his kindness. Strange as it may appear the time did come, and perhaps we shall see if Rodney remembered and kept his promise.

Rodney Gray was the only one of Captain Hubbard's Rangers who became a partisan. The Governor's attempt to have them sworn into the Confederate service against their will broke them up completely, and so disgusted some of their number that they declared they never wanted to see a man with a star on his collar again; but they could not remain at home while all their friends were making haste to go to the front for fear that the fun would all be over and the Yankees whipped before they could get there, and in the end every one of them became what he repeatedly declared

he never would be—a Confederate soldier. Then it was that Tom Randolph and his father began to bestir themselves. There was a good deal of pressure brought to bear upon every young man and boy in the South about that time, and those who would not put on a gray jacket or do something else to show their zeal for the cause were coldly treated and sometimes snubbed ; but Tom Randolph escaped all this, and even raised himself higher in the estimation of some of the Mooreville people by procuring, through his father's influence, a captain's commission in the State militia, with authority to recruit a company of mounted men who were to act as Home Guards. Tom knew the commission was coming and prepared for it by ordering a fine uniform and horse equipments of the latest and most expensive pattern, not forgetting an officer's sword which on its scabbard bore an inscription to the effect that the weapon was presented by his affectionate relatives, and on the blade the old Spanish legend :

Draw me not without a cause,
Nor sheath me with dishonor.

“That is a good motto, my son,” said Mr. Randolph, when Tom drew the weapon and proudly showed it as though his father had never seen it before, “and I trust you will bear it constantly in mind.”

“The cause of the South is a righteous cause, for it is the cause of freedom the world over,” shouted Captain Randolph, pounding the table with his fist and ignoring the fact that his father held more than four hundred men, women, and children in bondage at that moment. “To cease fighting for that cause at the bidding of the tyrant Lincoln would be dishonor; and the stain upon our record as a nation would be so deep and black that it *never* could be wiped out. When once I have drawn this beautiful sword in defence of the *rights* of my country, it shall never be sheathed until every Yankee south of Mason and Dixon’s line has been driven back where he belongs.”

The eloquent soldier pounded the table with his fist; everyone in the room, negro servants and all, applauded; and one of the latter ventured to say, in tones that of course were not

intended to reach the officer's ears: "Say, you niggahs! What'll you bet dem Yankees don't run fit to kill derselves when dey see Mass' Tom comin'?" As to Tom, he smiled complacently and said to himself: "That was a better speech than Rodney Gray delivered when those Rangers gave him that frog-sticker of his."

Knowing Rodney Gray and Dick Graham as well as you ought to know them by this time, what do you think they would have thought if they had been in that room and listened to Tom's words? Before twenty minutes had passed away he appeared upon the streets of Mooreville in the full glory of his captain's suit and with his horse duly caparisoned; but having no company to command he prudently left his sword at home.

It was Tom's wish and his father's to bring the strength of the company up to a hundred men; but Tom found it harder work to raise a small fraction of that number than it was to get his commission from the Governor. Everyone who presented himself was accepted, and

that too without reference to his social standing or his ability to pass the surgeon ; and when all other expedients to promote enlistments had been tried, Mr. Randolph came to the front, as he had done in the case of the Rangers, with the offer to arm and equip all recruits who could not furnish their own outfit. This helped matters along amazingly ; and when fifty men had been enrolled Captain Randolph ordered them to appear in one of his father's fields on a certain afternoon, armed and equipped as the law directed, for "company inspection." No one knew just what the order meant, but the men were all in the field at the appointed time ; and when Tom came to look at them as they sat in their saddles facing him, after making an awkward and ineffectual effort to fall in line, he was disgusted with them and with himself too. Until that moment he had no idea that he had been enrolling so unpromising a body of men. *Mén!* They looked more like lazy vagabonds, as indeed the most of them were. Rodney Gray himself could not have made soldiers of them. The next half hour was an

ordeal that Captain Tom never wanted to pass through again ; but we will let him describe it in his own way.

“They were the worst looking fellows I think I ever saw,” Tom told his father and mother when he reached home after the “inspection” was over. “I brought them together because I wanted to see how they looked, and how I would look riding at their head ; and to tell the honest truth, if a stranger had come into that field when they first tried to draw themselves up in line I believe I should have put spurs to my horse and galloped away rather than be seen in their company.”

“Why, what was the matter with them ?” inquired his mother, who took as deep an interest in the organization as Tom himself, and was anxious that it should win a name for him after the rebuff he had received at the hands of Captain Hubbard’s Rangers. “You knew they were not gentlemen when you asked them to give in their names. There are few of that sort left in the country, more’s the pity.”

“I know that ; but I hoped they might

have pride enough to make a half-way respectable appearance at inspection," answered Captain Tom. "In the first place, no two of them were mounted, armed, or dressed alike. In the next, they came just as they had been at work in the field in the forenoon, and I don't believe that half of them had taken the trouble to wash their faces or comb their hair."

"They looked just as we see them on the streets every day, I suppose," said Mr. Randolph.

"Just the same, only worse," replied Tom, who was almost mad enough to cry every time he thought of it. "Here was a man mounted on the heaviest kind of a plough horse and carrying a long squirrel rifle on his shoulder, and beside him was one on a little runt of a mule and armed with a heavy double-barrel deer-killer. Not a few of them had chicken or turkey feathers stuck in their slouch hats for plumes, and some had pipes in their mouths; and when I said that no smoking would be allowed in the ranks, they did not hesitate to tell me that I need not think I could boss them around as Rodney Gray had bossed the

Rangers while he was acting as their drill-master, for that was something they would not submit to.”

“Why the—the impudence!” exclaimed Mrs. Randolph; while her husband looked down at the floor and told himself that that was about what might have been expected of such men as he and Tom had been able to bring into the Home Guards.

“That’s the kind of soldiers they are,” continued Captain Tom. “They know I haven’t the power to enforce my commands, and so they intend to do pretty near as they please. The only reason they joined was because they wanted an excuse for keeping out of the army, and get the horses and weapons that were promised them.”

“And food,” added Mrs. Randolph.

“Food!” exclaimed her husband. “I didn’t promise them any food except in case they were ordered to some other part of the State, and then I said I would look out for the families of those who were too poor to make provision for them.”

“Well, a rough looking fellow who said he

was a member of the company came to the kitchen yesterday and asked for some bacon on the strength of that promise, and I gave it to him," said Mrs. Randolph.

"I'll bet he played a game on you," said Captain Tom.

"That's a pretty state of affairs!" exclaimed the father, profoundly astonished. "Don't give another mouthful to him or anybody else on the strength of promises I made to that company. As long as they stay about here they will earn their own food or go hungry."

"That's the kind of soldiers they are," repeated Tom. "They enlisted because they are afraid to go into the army and too lazy to work, and not because they care a picayune for the Confederacy. And after I had brought them in line as well as I could, and told one man to take his pants out of his boots and be sure that those boots were blacked the next time he came out to inspection, and ordered another to put his hat on straight and quit carrying his gun flat on his shoulder as he would if he were hog hunting in the woods, they made up their minds that they would

elect officers. When I told them that I hadn't brought them together for any such purpose, and that we would postpone the matter until the company had been brought up to its full strength, they didn't pay the least attention to me."

"It's a rabble—a mob and nothing else," cried Mrs. Randolph, who looked as angry as her son felt. "It is the one wish of my heart to see you take a proud position among the noble defenders of your country, but you will never have anything more to do with those ruffians with my consent. Whom did they choose for officers?"

Tom mentioned the names of two of the meanest men in the country for miles around, and his angry mother continued:

"A common overseer and an acknowledged chicken and hog thief! My son, you must not appear again in the company of those men."

"I don't intend to," replied Tom, jumping to his feet and striding up and down the room. "Although I despise every man in Captain Hubbard's company, and have ever since they defeated me for the second lieutenantcy, I must

acknowledge that they were a fine looking body of men, and I somehow got it into my head that my Home Guards would look and act just like them ; but they don't, and I am so disappointed that I don't see how I can ever get over it. I'll hold fast to my commission and rank, but I'll have nothing more to do with that company of Home Guards."

Slowly and sadly Captain Tom ascended to his room, where he took off his fine uniform and arrayed himself in the citizen's suit he had vowed never to put on again until he had helped the South gain her independence. Then he put his handsome sword into its cloth case, stood it up in the darkest corner of his closet, and closed the door. He felt like a monarch who had lost his crown.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN TOM SMELLS POWDER.

FOR a long time Captain Randolph remained firm in his resolution to have nothing more to do with the Home Guards. Although he did not formally throw up his command of the company he kept away from it as much as he could, and never ordered it to appear for drills and inspections; but by so doing he did not by any means escape being taken to task for the lawless acts of which his men were guilty. The company well deserved the name that Mrs. Randolph had applied to it, and one could not reasonably expect that they would conduct themselves as the high-toned Mooreville Rangers would have done under the same circumstances. It had never occurred to them to inquire what their duties would be when they were sworn into the service of the State, and it is extremely doubtful if their captain could have enlightened them on that point;

but in their ignorance they took it for granted that they had been given liberty to do as they pleased, and acting under the leadership of their lieutenants, Lambert, the overseer, and Moseley, the chicken and hog thief, they very soon made themselves known to and feared and hated by the citizens for miles around. Tom heard of their exploits now and then, and although he stamped his feet and shook his clenched hands in the air, he did nothing to show his authority. At last things came to such a pass that Captain Tom, to quote from Rodney's friend Griffin, who was closely watching the movements of the Home Guards, "had to fish or cut bait."

Bright and early one morning a couple of angry planters galloped furiously into Mr. Randolph's front yard, threw themselves from their horses, leaving the animals to tramp down the flower beds or stand still as they pleased, entered the house without knocking, and made their way through the hall into the dining room, where the family sat at breakfast. Without giving anybody time to express surprise at their abrupt entrance or to inquire

into the nature of their business, they stalked around the table to the chair in which Tom was sitting and shook their fists in his face pretty close to his nose.

“Look-a-here, young feller,” said the one whose rage would permit him to speak first, “what do you mean by sending them vagabonds of yourn, them Home Guards, into gentlemen’s houses to turn things up topsyturvy?”

The men looked so dangerous that Captain Tom turned white with alarm, but could not utter a word. He understood the charge and knew he was innocent, but he could not say so.

“When that company of yourn was first got together you took pains to spread it around that you were going to use them to clean out the Union men,” the planter almost shouted. “That was all right and I didn’t have a word to say against it, for I thought they oughter be driven out; but why don’t you confine yourselves to searching the houses of Union men, and let good and loyal Confederates like me and my neighbor alone? We are as strong for

the South and as ready to fight for her as you are ; and I tell you once for all——”

By this time Tom's father and mother had recovered themselves in some measure, but Tom himself was still so frightened that he could not speak. The former arose and placed chairs for the qisitors, and Mrs. Randolph told the girl to lay plates for them, adding that if they would sit down and tell their story while drinking a cup of coffee, she was sure her son could clear himself of the serious accusations they had brought against him. If their houses had been raided by the Home Guards they might rest assured that a Randolph was in no way to blame for it. This calmed the storm and made the visitors look as though they felt a little ashamed of themselves ; but they sat down and told their story.

“It seems that that man Lambert, who always was too lazy and trifling to earn an honest living, has give up his situation as overseer on Miss Randall's place, and took to raiding through the country on his own hook,” said the planter who had thus far done all the

talking. "We have heard of him a time or two, but so long as he stole from Union men and pestered them it was all right; but last night he jumped down on me and Boswell, and that is a little more than we can stand."

"I don't see what made him do that," exclaimed Tom, who had by this time found his tongue. "He knows you are good Confederates."

"Of course he knows it, and when we reminded him of it he didn't try to deny it; but he allowed we had guns in the house, and that them dangerous things couldn't be permitted to stay in the country except in the hands of soldiers. So he came to our houses and searched them; and as he had about a dozen men in his gang we couldn't help ourselves."

"As sure as I live I never gave him orders to search anybody's premises," declared Tom.

"I don't reckon you ever gave him much orders of any sort," replied the planter, with a look on his face which showed that he knew about how much authority Tom had over the Home Guards.

“And bear this in mind,” added his companion: “when we found that we couldn’t say or do anything to stop them, and that they were dead set on having the guns, we offered to bring ’em out rather than have them dirty vagabonds rummaging over our things; but that didn’t by no means suit Lambert. Him and his men must go in themselves so as to be sure of getting everything in the shape of weapons there was. And when they got into my house where do you suppose was the first place they went to?” added Boswell, with suppressed fury.

“I have not the slightest idea,” replied Mrs. Randolph, when the man stopped and looked around as if he expected an answer.

“To the bed,” said Tom, who had heard that it was a good plan for raiders to look between mattresses for things they wanted to find.

“No, they didn’t. They went straight to my wife’s bureau,” said Boswell fiercely. “That was a pretty place to look for guns, wasn’t it, now?”

Tom was thunderstruck. He knew that the

Home Guards had been denounced as robbers because they had ransacked the dwellings and smoke-houses of Union men, and had thought nothing of it, for Union men had no rights, and were not in the least deserving of sympathy; but this was a different matter altogether. It would never do to let such a story as that get to the ears of the Governor.

“Perhaps they looked into the bureau for revolvers,” he managed to say at length.

“No, they didn’t. They looked for rings and breastpins and bracelets and the like; but they didn’t find none, for my wife was sharp enough to put the whole business into her pocket as soon as she see that they were set on coming into the house. All the same, they got a rifle that cost me \$125 in gold in New Orleans in good times, and a shot gun that is worth almost twice as much. And I’ll tell you what’s a fact, Tom Randolph: I want them guns back. They’re mine, and if I don’t get ’em I’ll raise a fuss.”

“And while you are getting them you might as well tell Lambert to hand over the two guns he stole from me,” said the other visitor, “and

that if he ever pokes his long nose inside my door again I'll send the contents of one of 'em into it. I say nothing about the hams they took from my smoke-house, but they mustn't try to take any more. I reckon me and Boswell were a little too fast in accusing you of sending Lambert to search our houses, but you being the captain, you know, why—really you had oughter make them fellers go a little slower. What do you think of the situation anyhow, Mr. Randolph? And how long will it be before we shall have Washington?"

Mr. Randolph and his wife were glad to have the conversation turned into another channel, and so was Captain Tom, who did not want to hear any more about Lieutenant Lambert and his exploits. He was ill at ease as long as the visitors remained; but they went away as soon as they had drunk their coffee, and seemed as glad to go as the Randolphs were to have them.

Tom did not eat a hearty breakfast that morning, for the fear that the Governor might get wind of Lambert's latest raid and revoke his commission, added to the difficulties he

saw in his way of complying with the demands his late visitors had made upon him, took away his appetite. He must restore those guns to their owners—there were no two ways about that ; but how should he go to work to get them ? His first thought was to present himself before Lambert in full uniform and, by virtue of the authority conferred upon him by his captain's commission, which stated in plain language that he was to be obeyed by all persons under him, demand the return of the stolen property forthwith. That was the way any other captain would have gone about it, Tom thought ; but he was afraid that bluster might not prove successful in his case. He had reason to fear (and it was one of the heaviest trials he was called upon to bear) that he did not stand as high in the estimation of some of his men as he did in his mother's ; that he had on one or two occasions been compared to a wagon's fifth wheel in point of usefulness, and it would be just like the insubordinate Lambert to refuse point blank to obey his orders. That would be unfortunate, for it would show to the world, and perhaps to the Governor, that Tom

was not the real captain of the Home Guards. After looking at the matter from all sides he made up his mind that conciliation would be his best policy, and when he rode away to seek an interview with his lieutenant he wore citizen's clothes and left his sword behind. He found Lambert at his quarters on the Randall plantation, where he continued to live, although he had turned the work over to the field hands and seldom took the trouble to see how it was going on, and he was just getting ready to mount the horse that had been brought to his door.

“Hallo, lieutenant!” began Tom, with more familiarity and good-fellowship than he had ever before exhibited in addressing the man.

“Morning, cap'n,” replied the overseer, who might have responded to the salutation in a very different way if Tom had not been respectful enough to put a handle to his name. “Want to see me?”

“I came over on purpose to have a friendly talk with you,” said Tom. “Look here, old fellow; you will play smash if you don't stop

raiding the premises of such men as Boswell and Wallace. What induced you to do it?"

"Aint I got a right to look for we'pons?" demanded Lambert.

"You have authority from me," answered Tom, with some emphasis on the two last words, "to search the houses of Union men, but you have no right to enter the dwellings of Confederates."

"Look-a-here, cap'n. I knowed that them two men had guns in hiding."

"But you didn't expect to find them in bureau drawers, did you?"

"Eh?" exclaimed the overseer. He looked somewhat abashed for a moment and then continued: "When I search a house I search it. I look into every hole and corner in it."

"That is perfectly right when you search houses belonging to the enemies of your country; but it is all wrong when you enter the houses of our friends. Such work will turn them against us—make enemies of them. I saw Boswell and Wallace this morning and they are mad as hornets. They want their guns back."

“Well, the next time you see ’em just ask if they’ll have ’em now or wait till they get ’em. I want them guns myself to keep the Yankees from getting ’em.”

“The Yankees!” said Tom contemptuously. “You don’t think they will ever get this far South, do you?”

“They mout. Didn’t you say yourself that they was liable to come down from Cairo or up from New Orleans, and that we’d oughter have a company of Home Guards here to stop ’em?”

“I said there was a bare possibility that they might do so, and that it would be the part of wisdom to prepare for an emergency,” answered Captain Tom, who well remembered that he had used stronger language than that while urging Lambert to send in his name. “But I want those guns and must have them at once. You haven’t any commission from the Governor yet, and I——”

When Tom said this he stopped abruptly and gave such a start that his lieutenant looked up at him in surprise.

“What’s the matter, cap’n?” said he. “You what?”

“You haven’t received your commission from the Governor yet,” repeated Tom slowly and emphatically. “And when I——”

“Have I got to have a paper like yours?” exclaimed Lambert, looking astonished and interested. “That’s news to me.”

“Yes. And it can come to you only through my recommendation. I must certify that you were legally elected to the office you hold, and that was the reason I did not want you men to go through the farce of holding an election on horseback on the day I ordered you out for inspection,” replied Tom; but the truth was he had never thought of it until that moment. It was a bright idea that suddenly flitted through his mind, and he wondered why it had been so long in coming to him.

“Well, by gum!” was all the disgusted Lambert could say in reply.

“Your papers, if you get them, will be something like mine, only different, you know, for a captain outranks a lieutenant by a large majority,” continued Tom, improving to the utmost the advantage he had so unexpectedly gained. “You have no authority to make out

warrants, but I have ; and our non-coms., if we had any, would have to look to me for them.”

This was all Greek to the overseer, who had taken no pains to post himself on military matters, but he did not ask Tom to explain, for he was anxious to hear more about the commission he ought to have, but had not yet received.

“ Well, go on,” said he impatiently. “ And when you what ? ”

“ And when I make my first report to the Governor or his adjutant-general, and ask him about your commission and Moseley’s, I want to be able to say that you are in every way satisfactory to me as well as to the people hereabouts, and that I am sure you will make brave and obedient officers. But you can see for yourself that I can’t say that if you keep on bothering good and loyal Confederates like Wallace and Boswell. I think you had better give me those guns.”

“ I aint got but one,” replied Lambert, who seemed to have lost the independent and swaggering air he had assumed at the beginning of

the interview, "and I'll go right in and bring it out."

"Where are the others?" demanded Captain Tom.

"Well, Moseley's got one, Smith's got another, and where t'other one has went I disremember just at this minute."

"You distributed the spoils among you, it seems."

"Yes, kinder; so't the Yankees couldn't easy find them."

"Then you must ride around and gather them up; and as I have nothing particular to do this morning I will go with you. I'd rather be a king among hogs than a hog among kings any day," said Tom to himself, as his lieutenant turned about and went into his house, "but I confess I little thought I should get so low down as to command a lot of brigands. That idea about the commissions makes me the biggest toad in the puddle from this time on. I'll hold them up as prospective rewards for good behavior and prompt obedience of orders; but Lambert and Moseley shall never have

commissions on my recommendation, I bet you."

The Home Guards had deliberately stolen these four valuable guns, and Tom Randolph knew it as soon as he found how they had been scattered about. The plea that if permitted to remain in possession of their owners they might be captured by the Yankees, who would use them to kill Confederates, was Lambert's excuse for one of the worst outrages that had ever been perpetrated in that part of Louisiana ; but it was by no means the last. Three-fourths of all the Home Guards in the South were like Captain Tom's men, and the worst that can be said of them is that they acted as guards at Andersonville, Libby, Milen, and Salisbury. It was not the Confederate soldiers who served at the front, but the Home Guards, who starved the boys in blue to death in those prison pens, and hunted them with blood-hounds when they escaped.

The upshot of the whole matter was that Tom got the guns, which in due time were restored to their lawful owners, and plumed himself on having firmly established his au-

thority over his men. Well, they did behave a little better during the daytime and in that settlement where they were so well known, but they took to riding around of nights, and making "visits of ceremony" to isolated farm-houses in which they had reason to suppose that they would find something worth stealing. But riding was anything but easy work, and the novelty of frightening women and children and browbeating unarmed men wore off after a while; and when they had secured bacon and meal enough to last them for a few weeks, the Home Guards subsided and were seldom heard of again until the news of the glorious victory at Bull Run raised the war spirit of the Southern people to the old fever heat. Then they came to the surface again, and persecuted Union people in and around Mooreville so fiercely that some of them were compelled to flee for their lives, Captain Randolph being in command this time. From his friend Drummond, the telegraph operator, he secured a list of all suspected persons in the neighborhood, and with this to aid him Tom succeeded in doing effective work for the cause of South-

ern independence. But it was too much like labor to be kept up for any length of time ; there was not very much glory in it anyway ; the better class of Secessionists in the community became strongly opposed to it, and so the Home Guards dropped out of sight once more, not to appear again until Farragut captured New Orleans and sent some of his vessels up the river to effect a junction with Flag-Officer Davis at Vicksburg. When the people of Mooreville heard of it they were very indignant, and some of them declared that they would never submit to have their country overrun in that way—they would die first ; and to show how very much in earnest they were they stopped all work, shut up their houses, and ran about the streets in the greatest excitement. When the ship of war *Iroquois* came up with Commander Palmer on board and demanded the surrender of Baton Rouge, the mayor of that insignificant little town “indulged in the same mock-heroic nonsense that the mayor and council of New Orleans had been indulging in the week before.” He declared that the city would not be surren-

dered to any power on earth, and that if the Federals took possession of it they would do it without the consent and against the wishes of the peaceable inhabitants.

“It was all done for effect, and that man will be one of the last in the Confederacy to shoulder a musket,” said Rodney Gray when he heard of it; but being a soldier he applauded the action of Captain Palmer, who, without any fuss or parade, promptly took possession of the barracks, arsenal, and other property of the United States. He hoisted the flag of the Union over the arsenal too, and told the boastful mayor in pretty plain language that he would let it stay there if he did not want to get himself and his town into trouble.

“All honor to the brave citizens of New Orleans. They have shown me how I ought to act in this emergency,” said Captain Randolph on the morning the startling news came that some of the victorious Union fleet had steamed up the river. He posted for his room the moment he heard of it, and when he came down he was dressed in his uniform and wore his glittering sword by his side.

“Now take those things off and don't make a fool of yourself,” said Mr. Randolph, who had told his wife over and over again that from the bottom of his heart he wished he had never had anything to do with the Home Guards.

“Don't be rash, my dear,” said his mother in tones more befitting the occasion. “What are you going to do?”

“I shall assemble my company and place myself in a strong position between here and Baton Rouge, and stand ready to resist the enemy's advance upon Mooreville,” replied Tom. “The Federal General Butler has more than 100,000 men, and can easily spare some of them long enough to make our capital a heap of ashes; but the Governor shall hear that I harassed them while they were doing it, as our own Marion and his bold men used to harass the Redcoats.”

Those who were best acquainted with Tom Randolph knew that he would not have gone one step toward Baton Rouge if he had not had the best of reasons for believing that there were no troops at hand to take possession of

the city after the war ships had captured it ; but although Tom hinted as much to the members of his company whom he tried to rally to the defence of their hearth-stones, he could not induce more than a handful of them to turn out. It did not require very much courage to rob Union men who had previously been deprived of their weapons, but facing blue-jackets who were likely to have loaded muskets in their hands was a more serious matter. The excuses the Home Guards made for refusing to follow their captain were of the flimsiest kind ; but, all the same, they wouldn't go, and Tom finally rode away with only a baker's dozen of men at his heels. They arrived within sight of the spires of the city on the same day that Captain Palmer's sailors hoisted the Union flag over the arsenal, and might perhaps have witnessed the ceremony if they had gone a mile or two farther down the road ; but Captain Tom could not uncover Mooreville even for the sake of saving the capital of his State. He did not even venture near enough to the Mississippi to see the *Iroquois'* topmasts ; but he went closer to the enemy than

the cowards who remained at home, and that was something to be proud of.

Captain Tom slept in a planter's house that night, while his men bunked in the stables and corn cribs and under the trees in the yard, and the next morning made a wide detour to the river above the city with no other object in view than to be able to say, when he went home, that he had been there. If he had known what he was going to see and experience when he reached the river it isn't likely that he would have gone in that direction at all; for he halted his men behind the levee just in time to see a monster war vessel steaming leisurely up the swift, muddy current of the Mississippi. She was the blackest, ugliest looking thing that Tom's eyes had ever rested on, and the queerest sensations came over him as he gazed at her. It was not a cold day, but Tom shivered violently, and tasted something in his mouth that reminded him of salt.

“By gum! There's one of them things now. Let's try a whack at her. What do you say, boys?”

Tom had been on the point of giving the

signal for retreat, or trying to give it, but this astounding and reckless proposition staggered him so that he could not open his mouth. The man who made it showed that he was in earnest by swinging himself from his horse and advancing on all fours toward the levee, dragging his rifle along the ground at his side. In less time than it takes to tell it he and all his companions were lying prone behind the levee, using it as a breastwork, and Captain Tom sat in his saddle looking on like one in a dream. When they were all in position one of the Home Guards set up a warwhoop, a straggling fire ran along the top of the levee and bullets and buckshot went whistling toward the vessel. There were several men on her deck and around the wheel-house, and although Tom did not see any of them fall he did see that they were badly frightened, for they ran in all directions, and an instant later there was not one of them to be seen. The Home Guards yelled triumphantly and turned on their backs behind their breastwork to reload their guns. Then Tom managed to find his voice ; but it sounded so strangely that he

hardly knew whether it belonged to him or not.

“That’s the way to make the Yankees hunt their holes,” he said, in trembling tones. “Give it to them again! Cut their old tub to pieces, my brave——”

Just then a wide, dark opening appeared in the side of the vessel nearest them, a black object came slowly out, a thundering concussion rent the air, and a thirty-two pound shell came at them. It shrieked fearfully as it flew over the levee above their heads, and made such a horrid din when it exploded in the thick woods behind them, scattering iron and branches about and cutting down twigs and leaves in a perfect shower, that for a single instant the Home Guards were motionless with astonishment and terror. They had not hurt the gunboat at all, but they had made her captain angry, and the fear that he might resent the insult to his flag by firing more shells at them sent the Home Guards to their saddles in hot haste; and with Captain Tom, who rode the swiftest horse, far in the lead, they struck out for home at a better pace than they had

ever travelled before. And they never drew rein until they had left the dangerous neighborhood miles behind.

“It was the narrowest escape from an ambuscade I ever had in my life,” said Captain Tom to the first man he met when he rode into Mooreville that night, “and if it hadn’t been for my promptness in getting out of there I shouldn’t have had a man left. We’d have been cut to pieces or captured, the last one of us. We didn’t see any enemy except the ship we fired at, but a minute or so after she opened on us a battery of flying artillery, that had all the while been concealed in the timber in our rear, cut loose on us with all its guns, and it’s a miracle that one of us escaped to tell the story of the battle.”

“But my partner came from Baton Rouge to-day,” said the man doubtfully, “and he declares that there are no Yankee troops in the country this side of New Orleans. So where did that battery come from?”

“Don’t you believe any such stuff,” replied Tom indignantly. “I tell you the woods are full of them, and they are liable

to come to Mooreville between now and sunrise."

If no one else believed his story Tom believed it himself, and the consequence was he slept in his chair that night. But for some reason the Yankees did not appear as he had predicted, and they might have postponed their coming indefinitely had it not been for the lawless acts of Captain Tom's own men.

CHAPTER III.

THE CONSCRIPT'S FRIEND.

TOM RANDOLPH would have been very angry indeed if anyone had told him that the noise that thirty-two pound shell made when it exploded in the woods, and led him and his men to believe that there was a Union battery concealed there, had frightened all the war spirit out of him, but it is a fact that after his experience with the gunboat he did not show the least desire to take the field again at the head of his company. Everybody knew that there were no Federal troops in Baton Rouge, but there were war vessels in the Mississippi holding the city under their guns, and their presence had a depressing effect upon a good many red-hot rebels besides Tom Randolph. More than that, General Butler had assumed command at New Orleans; and the energetic and effective way in which he dealt with treason there opened the eyes of the

Mooreville people to the fact that there might be a day of settlement coming for them also, and that it would be well if they could have a tolerably clean record to show when the invading army moved up to take possession of Baton Rouge.

This was the way Mr. Randolph and some of his neighbors looked at the situation ; and acting upon the hints they dropped in his presence, Tom concealed his uniform and sword in the garret, where he thought no one would be likely to look for them. He was getting tired of war anyway, he said, and wished the past could be blotted out and things be as they were before South Carolina, by her senseless act of secession, brought so much trouble upon him and his friends. He was not as disgusted and angry as a good Confederate ought to have been when he heard a man from Baton Rouge affirm that after all the Yankees were not such a bad sort when one became acquainted with them, and that some of the towns-people were not ashamed to confess to a friendly feeling for the crews of the gunboats that were anchored in front of the city. The blue-jackets

always acted like gentlemen when they came ashore, and, true to their instincts of traffic, had established a lively little trade with the citizens. They purchased everything the latter had to sell in the way of garden-truck, milk, butter, and eggs, and paid for all they got in good money; or, what was better, in coffee, tea (store tea too, and not sassafras), wheat flour, and salt. It is true that the salt was not as fine nor as clean as some they had seen, for it had been taken from the brine of the beef and pork barrels with which the store-rooms of the gunboats were abundantly supplied; but it was acceptable to people who had boiled down the dirt floors of their smoke-houses in order to get the salt that had trickled off the hams and sides of bacon which had been cured there in better times. The gunboat officers also sent their soiled linen ashore to be washed, so that not a day passed during which there was not more or less communication with the fleet. This was a pleasant state of affairs all around, especially to the victorious blue-jackets, who had grown tired of fighting and wanted all the shore liberty they could get,

and it might have continued until the Confederate General Breckenridge made his unsuccessful attempt to regain control of the Mississippi above New Orleans had it not been for two things: the Confederate Conscription Act, and the determination on the part of the Home Guards to evade it. The passage of that act was like a destructive thunder-bolt from a clear sky, and there were those in Mooreville who refused to believe that their chosen rulers would be guilty of such perfidy; but the news had hardly been received before the enrolling officer put in his appearance, thus proving the truth of what we have already said—that the Richmond Government developed into a despotism so suddenly that it was plain the machinery for it had been prepared long before.

The enrolling officer, Captain Roach, was a dapper little fellow who did not look as though he had seen much service, and, indeed, he hadn't seen a day of it; for when he received his commission and orders from the Governor he was a practising lawyer in a small inland town. Beyond the very slight knowl-

edge which he had been able to gain from his printed instructions, he knew nothing of his duties or of soldiering; but his common-sense taught him that as Tom Randolph's commission was older than his own, military etiquette required that he should call upon Tom without any unnecessary delay—not to report to him, for Tom was not in the Confederate service or in any way connected with the conscription business, but merely to show him proper respect. He reached Mooreville in the morning, spent the rest of the day in opening an office and spreading abroad the news of his arrival, so that those whose duty it was to be conscripted would have no trouble in finding him, and the next morning mounted his horse and set out to find Captain Randolph. The first man he met on the road was Tom's first lieutenant. Captain Roach did not know him, but he saw that Lambert was anxious to ride on without speaking, and perhaps that was the reason he drew rein and accosted him.

“Good-morning,” said the captain pleasantly. “You know I have opened an office in Kimberly's store, I suppose?”

“Say! What made you ask me that question for?” demanded Lambert, who was instantly on his guard.

“Because I take you to be over eighteen and under thirty-five, and would like to have you drop around and see me,” was the reply.

“Well, I aint a-going to do it; and that settles it. See?”

“Really I *don't* see how you can get out of it.”

“Don't, hey? Well, I do. I aint Confedrit. I'm State Rights.”

“Are you not aware that there are no State Rights people any more?” asked the captain. “The conscription act that has just been passed withdraws all non-exempt citizens between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five from State control, and places them absolutely at the disposal of the President during the war.”

“But I aint agreeing to no such 'rangement, don't you know?” exclaimed Lambert, who did not like to see the enrolling officer so quiet and confident, for it looked as though he knew what he was talking about. “That was just what Lincoln wanted to do when he called on

our Gov'nor for soldiers to whop South Car'liny ; but our Gov'nor he said he wasn't that kind of a feller, and his men shouldn't go out of the State. Why don't he stick to his word and say the same to Jeff Davis ?”

“My friend, you don't understand the situation at all——” began the captain.

“Better'n you do, by a long sight,” interrupted Lambert. “I aint agreeing to no such bargain, I tell you. Them as wants to go to Virginy to fight for the 'Federacy can go for all me ; but I don't want to go, and, by gum ! I won't. And furder, I'm a Home Guard.”

“In your case that doesn't matter. The government would be quite willing to stretch a point in favor of home organizations that have proved themselves to be worth something, but you Mooreville fellows haven't done the first thing for the cause. You have turned some of our friends against us, but where are the Yankees you have shot, and how many prisoners have you taken ?”

“Look here, by gum !” exclaimed the lieutenant.

“I have heard all about you, and the Gover-

nor says in the letter he sent with my commission that the best thing I can do is to send you to a camp of instruction," continued the captain. "You are no good here, for you don't do anything."

"Dog-gone my pictur'! What's the reason we aint been doing something for the cause right along?" shouted Lambert, his red face showing that he was getting angry. "We've been the means of keeping the Union men in these parts from rising up and taking the country for the Yankees, and more'n that—we licked a gunboat in the river. Who told you we aint done nothing? It must be some enemy of ourn who aint got the spirit to jine in with us, and if I can find out who he is I'll make him sorry for it, I bet you. But you can't conscript me, I tell you. I'm an officer appointed by the Gov'nor."

"Ah! That does make a difference, perhaps."

"Well, I reckon it does," said Lambert, with a satisfied smile.

"Do you happen to have your commission with you? Or will you tell me when I can see it?"

This was what Lambert himself would have called a "side-winder," and his first thought was to hunt up Tom Randolph, and stand over him with his riding-whip until he had seen him write to the Governor asking for that long delayed commission. Tom had often promised to do it, but he never had, and now Lambert was likely to see trouble on account of his negligence.

"I am first leftenant of our company; my commission is all right, and that settles that point," said he at length. "If the Yankee General Butler brings his army from New Orleans to capture Mooreville he will run against a snag, for he will find me and my men here to stop him. We jined to guard our homes. That's why they call us Home Guards, and that settles the other point you was speaking of. We aint got no pris'ners to show, kase there aint no Yankees come nigh us; but we are just as much use here as we would be up there in Virginy."

"We need every man we can get," replied Captain Roach. "Those who do not come of their own free will must expect

to be taken by force, unless they can show that they are of use at home. You Mooreville Home Guards have had the finest chance in the world to make a name for yourselves. Why didn't you drive those gunboats away from Baton Rouge long ago?"

"Shucks!" exclaimed Lambert. "Why, man alive, they've got cannons on 'em."

"What of it? Couldn't you hide behind the levee, where you would be safe, and pick off every sailor who showed his head above decks? Couldn't you keep those small boats from coming ashore and going back loaded down with provisions? You have been giving aid and comfort to the enemy by permitting such things, and that's contrary to law. But I must ride along, for I am on my way to visit Captain Randolph. I am not sure that you are exempt simply because you are an officer in the State militia, but will tell you the next time we meet."

"You needn't mind looking it up, for I aint going, I tell you. But I'll tell you one thing, and that aint two: if you take me you will

have to take Tom Randolph likewise. I'll raise a fuss if you don't."

The two separated, and the enrolling officer kept on his way to the home of Captain Randolph, who had somehow heard that he might look for a distinguished visitor on this particular morning, and was thrown into a state of great excitement by the unwelcome news. The presence of the enrolling officer in town was all the evidence Tom needed to prove that there was no immediate danger of an invasion by the Federals, so he brought his uniform from its hiding place in the garret; and when he had arrayed himself in it, and leaned his sword in one corner of the gallery to show that he was prepared to answer when duty called, he was ready for the visit—that is, as ready as he ever would be, for he would not have seen Captain Roach at all if he could have thought of any way to avoid it. Rumor said that the captain looked as though he might have come out of some lady's bandbox, but all the same Tom supposed him to be a Confederate veteran who had seen service on many a hardly contested field, and who would overawe him with

his profound knowledge of military matters. Tom wished now that he had made a little better fight with that gunboat, or that he had slipped into Baton Rouge some dark night with a few picked men and pulled down the flag that the Yankee sailors had hoisted over the arsenal.

“Oh, what honors I might have gained for myself if I had only thought of these things before,” he said to his mother. He always went to her with his troubles now, or when he stood in need of encouragement and advice, his father having told him somewhat sharply that he had washed his hands of the Home Guards and never wanted to hear of them again as long as he lived. “But that is the way it is with me. My wit comes too slow to be of any use.”

“I am very glad that you did not think of them before, you reckless boy,” replied Mrs. Randolph. “Your record is better than I wish it was, for I am afraid it will take you into the army. What would you do if this enrolling officer should decide to take the company just as it stands,

and swear you into the Confederate service?"

"Cæsar's ghost!" cried Captain Tom, in great alarm. "If my record as a loyal soldier leads him to do that, I shall be sorry I ever put on this uniform. What could I do?"

"Could you not follow the same course that Rodney Gray pursued, when General Lacey came up from New Orleans to swear the Mooreville Rangers into the Confederate Army?" inquired Mrs. Randolph.

"Mother, if you were a man you would be a general yourself," exclaimed Tom, his fears vanishing on the instant. "If a first duty sergeant can back down a major-general, I reckon a captain in the State militia can do the same for a Confederate captain."

He spoke boldly enough, but when one of the house servants came in to tell him that there was a strange soldier riding into the yard he felt his courage oozing out at the ends of his fingers, and he would hardly have dared to go to the door to meet his visitor if his mother had not assured him that she would go also, and that she would remain

close at his side to support him during the dreaded interview.

The enrolling officer did not look like a very stern soldier, she told herself, when she saw him get off his horse and shake hands with Tom, who had hastened down the steps to meet him ; but then he was backed up by the whole tremendous power of the Confederate Government, and it was to her interest and Tom's to make a friend of him if she could. Captain Roach was equally anxious to secure Tom's assistance in the disagreeable and perhaps dangerous work he had to do, and the consequence was it was no trouble at all for them to get acquainted, or to come to an understanding with one another. After they had spent a few minutes in talking over the situation, and the enrolling officer had shown his written instructions, as well as a copy of the law by which he was supposed to be governed, the latter said :

“What surprises me very much is that there is not the first word said about exemptions. Whether it was an oversight or not the fact remains that, according to this law,

every man between the specified ages must be conscripted.”

“And that is perfectly right,” said Captain Tom, making a hurried mental list of certain persons in the neighborhood whom he would be glad to see go first of all. “Everybody except our Home Guards.”

“No, sir,” said Captain Roach in tones so decided that Tom’s under jaw began to drop down. “The law excepts nobody; but wait a minute. After the regiments and companies that have gone to the front from this State are filled up, the rest of the conscripts will remain at home as a reserve to be drawn upon at intervals of not less than three months, so that our organizations in the field can be kept always full. Now, why can’t you help me so as to keep your company of Home Guards together as long as possible? If we work it right perhaps you will not be called upon at all.”

“That’s the idea!” exclaimed Tom, greatly relieved, while his mother smiled her approval of the suggestion, and told Captain Roach on the spot that she expected him to stay to din-

ner, and as long as he remained in that part of the country to make himself as free in her house as he would in his own. When she ceased speaking Tom continued: "I am like Nathan Hale, who, when the British were about to hang him as a spy, said he was sorry he had but one life to give to his country; but for all that I should like to stay here until I have seen some of our neighbors who have had so much to say against the South sent to the front. But how shall I work it to keep my company together?"

"By doing as you have suggested," replied the captain. "By first sending away those who ought to be made to fight for the South, since they have had so much to say against her and her cause. Perhaps by the time they have been killed off our independence will be acknowledged; and then we shall not need any more soldiers."

"That's the idea!" said Tom again. "But how can the Home Guards help you?"

"By serving in place of the troops that I am authorized to call on for assistance," answered Captain Roach. "There will be a

camp of instruction established somewhere in the vicinity very shortly, and it will be my duty to forward my conscripts to that camp as fast as I can get them together. Of course they will not go willingly——”

“I understand,” interrupted Captain Tom. “You want me to send some of my men with them as guards.”

“Exactly. It will be a feather in your cap as well as in mine if we can attend to the business without calling upon the government for aid. I don’t want to do that if I can avoid it, for every man we can raise is needed at the front to resist McClellan’s advance upon Richmond. We must be alive, for there’s going to be hot work up there.”

“I am with you; and I don’t know of anything that would suit the Home Guards better,” replied Tom, glad of the opportunity to gain a little cheap notoriety without putting himself in danger; and when Captain Roach rode away from the house after dinner Tom accompanied him to his office in Kimberly’s store, and assisted in obtaining some poll-books from which he could make out a

list of the unhappy men who were subject to military duty under the terms of the Conscription Act.

Of course there were a goodly number of young fellows in the settlement between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one whose names did not appear on the poll-books, for they were not voters; but Tom had them in his mind, and with his mother's aid and Lambert's he succeeded during the following week in making out a complete list of them. At the head of the list stood the name of Edward Griffin, Drummond's assistant operator, who had warned Rodney Gray that he was to be arrested the moment he left the boat at St. Louis; but Drummond's name did not appear at all.

"Griffin is a particular friend of one of my worst enemies," explained Tom. "Not only is he strong for the Union, but he has had a good deal to say about me and my company behind our backs, and I want you to serve a notice on him the first thing you do. I wish they would make haste and establish that camp of instruction, and when Griffin is sent

there I want to command the squad that goes with him. I wish, too, that Rodney Gray was here to go with him."

In the meantime events proved that the people of the South were not as willing to submit to the despotic acts of their government as they ought to have been, especially in Georgia and Arkansas, "where it seemed that a conflict might arise between State and Confederate authorities." Officers of the militia in the former State were arrested by the enrolling officers, but the Governor demanded their release and threatened to arrest the Confederates if they did not let his State officers alone. The Richmond Government yielded the point, but said to the Governor of Georgia, through the Secretary of War: "If you arrest any of our enrolling officers in their attempts to get men to fill up the Georgia regiments now in the face of the enemy, you will cause great mischief. I think we may as well drive out our common enemy before we make war upon each other." In Arkansas Governor Rector threatened to secede from the Confederacy, and called for 4500 men to de-

fend the State, adding that "the troops raised under this call are intended exclusively for home protection, and will not, under any circumstances, be transferred to the Confederate service without their consent." In short, the Confederacy was in a very bad way, and their authorities knew it; for on the 21st of April the congress "adjourned in such haste as to show that the members were anxious to provide for their own personal safety." That was the time when a rebel newspaper invented the word "skedaddle," and that was the time too when McClellan could have taken Richmond; but he "wasted three full months, every day of which was of vital moment to the Confederacy, in doing nothing," and when at last he was ready to advance, he found himself confronted by an army that was larger than his own.

The murmurs of dissatisfaction that arose all over the South when that sweeping Conscription Act was passed were not entirely lost upon the Richmond government, and the next news that came to Mooreville was that another act had been passed providing for exemptions.

Rodney Gray's father was one of the first to hear of it, and the next time he went to Mooreville he stopped at the telegraph office and called Ned Griffin to the door. The young fellow had been very much distressed ever since he received notice from Captain Roach to hold himself in readiness to march to the camp of instruction with the first squad of conscripts that left town, and Tom Randolph had been mean enough to let him know how his name happened to be first on the list. Griffin was the only support of a widowed mother, and he knew that things would go hard with her when the small sum he received for his work in the telegraph office ceased to come into her hands every month. More than that, he believed in the Union and the flag that waved over it, and did not want to fight against his principles. When he came to the door in answer to Mr. Gray's hail he looked as though he had lost the last friend he had in the world.

"I came here to cheer you up a bit by telling you that you need not go into the army if you don't want to," was the way in which Rodney's father announced the object of his

visit. "The new law provides for the exemption of one agriculturist on each farm, where there is no white male adult not liable to military duty, employing fifteen able-bodied negroes, on condition that the party exempted shall give bond to deliver to the government, in the next twelve months, 100 pounds of bacon or its equivalent in salt pork, and 100 pounds of beef for each able-bodied slave employed on said farm."

Young Griffin gasped for breath, but did not say a word in reply. He did not smile either, as Mr. Gray did, for he failed to see how that new law could affect him.

"Now, I happen to have such a farm up the river road," continued the planter. "There's no one on it but a driver to look out for things, and if you have a mind to go up and take charge of it I shall be glad to have you. And I think I can put you in the way of earning more money than you do now."

"But, Mr. Gray, I am not an overseer," stammered Griffin, who wished from the bottom of his heart that he had chosen that humble but useful vocation instead of teleg-

raphy. "I don't know the first thing about farming."

"Well, you can't learn younger, can you?"

"No, sir. But I—you see—the fact of the matter is, where are the bacon and beef to come from? If they were selling at a dollar a ton I couldn't buy a hundred pounds."

"You have a whole year in which to pay it," replied Mr. Gray. "But I don't believe in going in debt, and perhaps we can scare up cattle and hogs enough on the farm to fill the bill; and I shall depend on you to raise others to replace them. I think you had better go. You can take your mother along to keep house for you, and I don't see why you can't live as well there on the farm as you do here in town. Tell Drummond to come out here a moment."

"Mr. Gray," said Griffin, with tears of gratitude in his eyes, "I wish you would ride around to our house and let mother thank you for your kindness. I don't know how."

"I will save her and you the trouble," said the planter, bending down from his saddle and speaking in tones so low that none of the

passers-by could hear his words. "Who was it that kept Rodney from falling into the clutches of that Yankee cotton factor in St. Louis? Tell Drummond to come here."

Drummond came, and Griffin afterward said that he never saw so mad a man as his chief was when the planter explained matters to him in a few brief but emphatic words. The operator had nothing against Griffin personally, but Tom Randolph had, and as Tom had been friendly enough to keep his name off the enrolling list, Drummond felt in duty bound to make common cause with him.

"Mr. Gray, I am afraid it won't work," said he. "Griffin was conscripted before that exemption law was passed."

"I am prepared to take the risk," was the quiet rejoinder. "In case objections are made we shall insist on having the first conscripts selected from the poll-books instead of from a private list; and if any objections are made to that we will report the matter at headquarters. Your name comes

pretty close to the top of the list, Mr. Drummond."

The operator was frightened and saw plainly that it would not be a safe piece of business to make an enemy of Mr. Gray; he knew too much. Besides, he was one of the richest planters in the State, and such men always exerted a good deal of influence when they set about it.

"Of course, sir, I hope it will work," Drummond hastened to say, "for I don't want to see anybody forced into the army. I only said I was afraid it wouldn't."

"I understand. Ned, you might as well start now as any time. Go and say good-by to your mother, and hurry up to my house. I will be there in a couple of hours, and after we have had a snack we'll ride up to the farm."

From the telegraph office Mr. Gray went to Kimberly's store, where he created another commotion. Tom Randolph was there, and so were some of the Home Guards, who had of late taken to spending all their waking hours at the enrolling office. Captain Tom would

have protested loudly if his amazement and chagrin had permitted him to speak at all, but Captain Roach had no objections to offer when Mr. Gray told him that he would have to find someone to take Griffin's place in the first squad of conscripts that was sent to the camp of instruction, for Griffin himself was exempt under the law, or would be as soon as he had taken his new position.

"I am surprised at you," exclaimed Tom when Mr. Gray had mounted his horse and galloped away. "You mustn't let that man Griffin off; you can't. Haven't I told you that he is Union?"

"I have my own interests to look out for," replied Captain Roach rather sharply, "and consequently I cannot afford to get into trouble with such a man as Mr. Gray. He didn't say much, nor did he bluster at all; but I knew by the glint in his eye that there was a whole battery of big guns behind the little he did say, and that he was ready to turn them loose on me if I said an ugly word to him. We haven't been playing square since this thing began, and he knows it; and if

he should insist on having a new deal from the poll-books, with your list of names thrown out, where would your friend Drummond be? Where would you be, seeing that even Home Guards are not exempt?"

"I just don't care; and that's all there is about it," whined Tom, who was mad enough to cry if he had been alone. "They ought to be exempt, and I don't see why those Richmond fellows left them out."

"That's neither here nor there. They left them out; but in working to keep you with me I have practically exempted you, and that is something I had no business to do. I can't imagine where Mr. Gray got his information, but he understands all this, and if he should report me to the Governor I'd have to join some regiment in the field; and that's a place I want to keep away from as bad as you do."

"Well, I must say that things have come to a pretty pass when a man can say who shall go into the army and who shall not, just because he happens to have a little money," declared Tom spitefully.

“That’s the way the thing stands, and if you want to stay at home you and your men had better be doing something.”

These chance words, which really did not mean anything, set some of the Home Guards to thinking.

CHAPTER IV.

LIEUTENANT LAMBERT'S CAMPAIGN.

OF course the principal topic of conversation at the enrolling office during the rest of the day was Mr. Gray's unexpected interference in behalf of Ned Griffin, the conscript. It frightened Captain Roach, enraged and disgusted Tom Randolph, and put Lieutenant Lambert into a very anxious frame of mind. The latter was obliged to confess that his chances for keeping out of the army were very slim indeed.

“That's the way the thing stands, and if you want to stay at home you and your men had better be doing something,” he kept saying to himself as he galloped along the dusty road on his way home. It was easy enough for Captain Roach to talk, but what was there that the Home Guards could do to distinguish themselves, seeing that the Federal troops were so secure in their position at New Orleans that

the whole Confederate Army could not drive them out, and that the gunboats in the river in front of Baton Rouge could not be whipped by men who were armed only with squirrel rifles and shot guns? Lambert had been turning the matter over in his mind ever since Mr. Gray left the enrolling office in the morning, and now he did something which he had declared he never would do as long as he lived. He went out of his way to ask the advice of a Confederate veteran who had just returned from the Army of the Centre disabled by wounds received in battle.

There were several of these crippled veterans in the neighborhood, and they had been so many thorns in Tom Randolph's side ever since they first began straggling home from the front. To begin with, they turned up their noses at the Home Guards, and made all manner of sport of their finely uniformed captain when they saw him riding along the road slyly pricking his horse with his spurs to make the animal prance and go sideways, as an officer's horse ought to do. They laughed, too, when they heard the Home Guards tell of their fight

with that gunboat, and some of them went so far as to declare that, disabled as they were and half dead with camp fever besides, they could arm themselves with corn-stalks and drive Tom Randolph and his warriors into the Mississippi River.

In the next place, almost all these veterans had brought home with them a goodly supply of Yankee relics and trophies in the shape of uniform coats, pants, caps, and overcoats that had been picked up on the field, and which, for some reason or other, they seemed anxious to get off their hands. So they offered them to the Home Guards in exchange for citizens' clothing of equal or less value, and the latter were always found willing to trade. Captain Tom was disgusted and angry when first one man and then another appeared at the enrolling office clad in some portion of a shabby uniform that had once belonged to a Federal trooper or infantry-man, and ordered the wearers to clear out and never come there again unless they could come properly dressed ; but the Home Guards paid no sort of attention to him. They were soldiers, they said, and since

their own government did not think enough of them to provide them with uniforms they felt at liberty to obtain them where they could. Besides, their new clothes, even though they were well worn and had once belonged to Lincoln's hirelings, were warm and comfortable, and the blue overcoats would keep out next winter's cold as effectually as gray ones. Much against his will Tom finally appealed to the enrolling officer; but the latter could not help him, for he had no authority over the Home Guards.

"But you might threaten to conscript them if they don't obey my orders," suggested Tom.

"I shouldn't like to do it for a little thing like that," replied Captain Roach. "They've got the uniforms, and I don't see how you are going to keep them from wearing them. What difference does it make, anyway? You don't have to go on dress parade."

"No matter for that," replied Tom. "I didn't enter the service to command a lot of Yankees, and I won't do it. Suppose a general officer should happen along and order

them out for drill and inspection! I'd feel so ashamed of myself that I know I should take to my heels."

"Make your mind easy on that score," was the captain's answer. "If you don't take to your heels until that happens you will never run. Judging from what I have learned since I have been here, the government cares no more for companies of this kind than it does for so many wild hogs in the woods. If it were not for you and your mother I would conscript the last one of them."

"But what do you suppose makes the returned veterans so anxious to get rid of these Yankee uniforms and things?" continued Tom. "It looks to me as though there might be something back of it."

"That's the way it looks to me, too," replied Captain Roach. "They don't want to have a Yankee scouting party ride up on them suddenly and say: 'Look here, Johnny; have you been robbing some wounded or captive Yank? If not, where did you get those blue clothes?'"

"But the Yankees are not here," cried Tom.

“I know they are not here now, but they’re coming ; and if they keep on besting us at every point, as they are doing at this minute, they will be here before long, too. You needn’t think that Farragut is going to remain idle down the river, or that Flag-Officer Davis is going to keep on doing nothing up the river while we are fortifying Vicksburg. There’s going to be fun here one of these days.”

And sure enough there was. It came much sooner than Captain Roach had any reason to think it would, and Lieutenant Lambert of the Home Guards, whom we saw on his way to ask advice of a Confederate veteran, was the man who did the most to help it along. He found the soldier of whom he was in search at his home. He was sitting on the gallery enjoying his after supper smoke ; but when he saw the Home Guard alight at his gate he staggered to his feet, laid hold of the crutch that leaned against the house behind his chair, and said, in mock alarm :

“The man you want to see don’t live here no more. He done moved outen the country two year ago come next July. Clear yourself.

I'm that skeared of gray-back soldiers that I can't sleep none fur a week after seein' one of 'em."

"Aw! Quit your nonsense," growled Lambert, "or, by gum! I'll come there and lick ye even if you aint got but one leg to defend yourself with." He hitched his horse at the fence, shook hands with the veteran, then seated himself on the porch close by his chair and continued: "Me and you have always been the best kind of friends, Abner, and I don't want you to sniff at me just kase you've been shot by the Yankees and I aint."

"I won't, Sile; I won't never do the like no more. But a Home Guard! And lickin' a gunboat that's got 'leven inches of iron on her sides and four foot of solid oak back of that, with nothing in the wide world but pop-guns!" said the veteran, taking his pipe from his mouth to indulge in a hearty peal of laughter. "*And* Tom Randolph fur a cap'n. That there is a leetle the worst I ever heard of. Hey-youp! Steady on the left centre!" he yelled, dropping his crutch upon the gallery and grasping with both hands the stump of

his leg, which he had wrenched a little too severely during his paroxysms of merriment.

“I almost disremembered that I aint got only part of a leg on this side. I left the rest up to Shiloh. I'm glad to see you again, Sile; I am so. But I would be a heap gladder if me and you had chawed hard-tack and fit the Yanks together. Then you wouldn't be no such triflin' thing as a Home Guard.”

“But I don't want to fight no Yanks,” said Lambert truthfully.

“Don't you want to fight no Yanks? Well, I don't know's I'm blamin' you fur that. They aint by no means the easy fellers to lick that we uns thought they was goin' to be, and when they set up that yell of theirs to let we uns know they was comin' fur us—I tell you, Sile, my hair always riz when I heard that yell, and I wisht I was to home grabblin' fur taters.”

“Then what makes you poke fun at me fur?” demanded Lambert. “I am to home now and I want to stay; but Cap'n Roach he allows that if we uns don't do something pretty sudden we're liable to be conscripted.”

“Like enough. Then why don’t you uns do something?”

“That’s what I come here to see you about. What is they, I’d like to know, that we can do? If the Yanks would only come where we be [you will notice that Lambert did not say “Yankees” any more. He copied the veteran and used the shorter word], we uns could show the folks about here that we Home Guards aint by no means the useless truck they take us to be; but we can’t go all the way to New Orleans fur the sake of fightin’ ’em.”

“You uns will see Yanks enough if you stay right where you be,” said the veteran, with another laugh. “I aint spilin’ fur a sight at any more of ’em, but all the same I look to see them ridin’ right along this road while I am settin’ on my gallery watchin’ of ’em. They aint come this clost to Mooreville to go away without seein’ it. They’re hop-pin’ us right along, and we had oughter be whopped.”

“Now, just listen at you!” said Lambert reproachfully.

“I’m only tellin’ you what I know,” said the veteran in earnest tones. “Look at the way they’re doin’! When the law was passed that everybody must be conscripted, why didn’t they go to work and conscript everybody? Why didn’t they put the old soldiers ahead and shove the Johnny Raws into the ranks? Steader that they let the old soldiers stay in the ranks, and put over them fur officers a lot of new chaps who couldn’t a’told a Yank from a ground-hog if they had seed the two standin’ in one place. We uns aint a goin’ to whop nobody with a lot of greenhorns to command us, and although I aint by no means glad to go hobblin’ through the world on one leg, I am mighty glad of an excuse to get outen the army. Now, there’s that there Rodney Gray.”

“By gum! I wish he was here to be conscripted,” exclaimed Lambert.

The veteran took his pipe from his mouth, blew a cloud of smoke into the air, and looked at his companion with an expression on his face which seemed to say that he did not know whether to laugh or get angry. But finally

he concluded to laugh, and he did so most uproariously, rolling about on his chair as if he were in danger of falling out of it, but all the while taking good care not to give his wounded leg another wrench.

“Why, man, he’s a soldier, Rodney is,” he said as soon as he could speak, “and a mighty good one, too. He’s been in more battles than me, and that’s useless. He fit all through Missouri with Daddy Price, and then they brung him over to the Army of the Centre, and that’s where I seen him. They wanted to make a big officer of him, but Rodney he wouldn’t have it so, kase he’s plum sick of the war, same as I be, and allows to come home soon’s his extry three months is out. You can’t tech Rodney Gray.”

“I know that well enough, but I wish we could. You see, Tom Randolph——”

“You needn’t say no more,” laughed the veteran. “Rodney got an office in Cap’n Hubbard’s Rangers and Tom didn’t, and Tom is mad about it and wants to spite Rodney in some way. But he can’t do it, and if he tries it ole man Gray will make him wish he hadn’t.”

“And ole man Gray is another chap I’d like mighty well to see sent to the front,” exclaimed Lambert angrily; “but we can’t touch him neither. He showed his hand when he come into the office this morning and told Roach that he’d have to let that Griffin boy go free, kase he allowed to buy him off with bacon and beef; and Roach was that skeared that he dassent open his mouth.”

“What was he skeared of?”

“That ole man Gray would report him fur leavin’ the names of Tom Randolph’s friends off’n the conscript list, when he had oughter put them on like he found them in the poll-books.”

“Like enough,” replied Abner. “And then you and Tom Randolph and all the rest of the Home Guards would have stood as fine a chance of goin’ to the front as Ned Griffin. It would serve you just right fur trainin’ under such a no account cap’n as you have got. Why don’t you cut loose from him and do something on your own hook? That would be me if I was you.”

“Taint safe,” replied Lambert, who had

not yet forgotten that he brought himself into trouble the last time he tried to do something on his own hook. "Somehow our folks have got to be mighty tender of the Union men about here and don't like to have them pestered."

"You let your Union neighbors alone and pester them that's got we'pons into their hands," said the veteran indignantly. "You uns aint got no call to fight them that can't fight back ; but there's them gunboats down to the river."

"Well, what of 'em?" demanded Lambert, trembling at the bare thought of again venturing within gunshot of one of those black monsters. "They've got cannons on 'em, and they shoot balls bigger'n your head. Don't I know? Aint I been in a fight with one of 'em?"

"Shucks!" sneered Abner. "You stand about as much chance of bein' hit by one of them big balls as you do of bein' struck by lightnin'. I have seed me on the skirmish line lyin' fur hours behind a stump that wasn't no bigger'n a plug hat, while shell and solid shot

was tearin' up the ground all around me. They don't do damage once a week less'n they're drapped into a line of battle or into a fort that is packed full of men."

"But how can we lick 'leven inches of iron and four foot of solid oak?" protested Lambert.

"Shucks!" exclaimed the veteran. "I aint talkin' about lickin' on 'em. I'm talkin' about pesterin' of 'em—drivin' their row-boats back when they start to come to the shore, and pickin' off the officers as fast as they come outen their holes in the cabin. You uns could lay behind the levee and do that, and be as safe as you be to home; kase the shells they would send at you would all fly over your heads, and when they bu'st they would be a mile to your rear."

The lieutenant of the Home Guards was overjoyed to hear these encouraging words fall from the lips of a man who had faced the Yankees in battle and knew what he was talking about. He had given his friend Abner to understand that he was one of the few who followed Captain Tom when the latter rode

out with a handful of brave men to see if the Union Army was advancing upon Mooreville from Baton Rouge, but there was not a word of truth in his story. He was one of the majority who excused themselves and stayed behind, and all he knew about that desperate fight with the gunboat and the concealed battery that opened on the rear of the Home Guards was what his comrades told him. The veteran did not seem to think that the big guns on the war vessels were so very dangerous, and Lambert began to pluck up courage.

“’Pears to me that Cap’n Roach said something like that the first time I talked with him,” said the latter.

“Like enough; and if he did you can bet that that is what he would do if he had as many Home Guards under his command as you have got. I can’t fur the life of me see what makes them Baton Rouge folks so very friendly with the Yanks, anyhow. They take ’em into their houses and visit with ’em, and feed ’em, dog-gone it all, and I say such doings aint right. If ole Daddy Bragg was here fur about five minutes he’d put a stop to

all that friendship business, I bet you, and like as not he'd have some of you Home Guards shot fur lettin' it go on as long as it has. Anyway, he'd kick Tom Randolph into the ranks and put a soldier in his place. That's the way they do things up in the Army of the Centre."

The result of this interview was that when Lieutenant Lambert took leave of the veteran and rode home to a late supper he was fully satisfied in his own mind that Tom Randolph was totally unfit for the responsible position he held, that the Home Guards, who under proper leadership might have made themselves known throughout the length and breadth of the Confederacy, had been kept in check too long already, and that he (Lambert), being second in command of the company, had a perfect right to take matters into his own hands without saying a word to anybody about it. But it was a somewhat delicate task, he told himself. Although Lambert looked upon the friendly relations existing between the crews of the Union war vessels and the Baton Rouge people as a burning disgrace, he did not relish the

idea of trying to bring them to an end, for the citizens might not like it, and, worse than that, they might make him trouble on account of it; but something must be done or he would be compelled to go into the army, seeing that he had no rich and influential friend like Mr. Gray to purchase his release with bacon and beef. So Lambert's mind was made up, and before he reached home his campaign was fully planned.

“I'll raise a big squad and start for the city to-morrow night,” he soliloquized, flourishing his riding-switch in the air to give emphasis to his thoughts. “And if I once gain a footing behind the levee I'll put a stop to that friendship business, I bet you. I'll give the folks to understand that we uns don't like the way they're giving aid and comfort to the enemies of their country, and make them Yankee gun-boatmen stay on board their ships where they belong. I'll take pains, too, to see that the Gov'nor hears of it, and perhaps he'll say that I had ought to be cap'n of the Home Guards in place of Tom Randolph.”

That was an encouraging thought, and the

longer Lambert dwelt upon it the more excited he became. He did not sleep much that night, and after an early breakfast mounted his horse and rode through the country to muster his men ; but as fast as he found them and unfolded to them the details of his campaign he was met by the same excuses and refusals that Tom Randolph had vainly tried to combat. The fighting member of the company, the one who was always eager to shoot or hang the defenceless Union men he assisted in robbing, was feeling so very poorly on this particular morning that he was thinking strongly of riding over to a neighbor's to see if he could not borrow a dose or two of quinine ; the second had promised to go to a log rolling ; the third had a lame horse and didn't rightly know where he could go to get another ; and not more than three or four out of the fifty men whom Lambert summoned to follow him to Baton Rouge had the courage and honesty to tell him that they did not like to do it.

“I wouldn't mind hiding behind the levee and shooting a few Yankees,” said Lieutenant Moseley, “but they'll shoot back, and like as

not that'll make the Baton Rouge folks mad at us. Ask somebody else. You can get all the men you want and I don't reckon I'll go."

Whenever a Home Guard talked to him in this way Lambert always said in reply :

"Well, then, if you don't want to go and win a name fur yourself you can stay to home till Roach gets ready to conscript you. If you were in Kimberly's store yesterday you must have seen fur a fact that we uns aint safe from going into the army just kase we happen to belong to the Home Guards. Cap'n Roach he has said time and again that we was liable to go if we didn't wake up and do something, and that if he had been our commander he wouldn't have let them city people get on such amazing good terms with the Yanks. Le's go down there and make 'em quit it right now, and say nothing to nobody till the thing is done. Remember, I don't ask every man, but only just them that we want to have stay in the company. When we get back I'll give Cap'n Roach a list of them that went with me, and if he wants to conscript the others—them that was afraid to face the enemies of their

country—and send them to the camp of instruction, he can do it and welcome. Now, what do you say?”

It was by the use of such arguments as these that Lieutenant Lambert succeeded in inducing some of his particular friends to believe that it might be policy for them to join his expedition, and that night they secretly gathered at a designated place outside the town and started for Baton Rouge. When they arrived within sight of the church spires at daylight they did not attract attention to themselves by entering the city in a body, for Lambert was afraid that some Union man or converted rebel might suspect the object of their visit and interfere with their designs by signalling to the fleet. They separated and went in by different roads and in small parties, and came together again in the neighborhood of the landing at which the boats from the fleet always touched the shore, taking care to leave their horses behind some warehouses out of sight.

“Now be careful, everybody,” commanded Lambert, placing a fresh cap on his rifle and

waving his hand toward the levee as a signal to his men to advance and conceal themselves behind it. "We can't do 'em no damage from here—it's too fur; so we must wait till some of their row-boats come off."

The Home Guards bent themselves almost double and stole across the clear space that intervened between the warehouses and the levee; and so cautious were they in their movements that the quartermasters on watch on the decks of the different gunboats, who were constantly sweeping the banks on both sides of the river with their long-distance spy-glasses, saw no signs of them, and so silent that when they crept to the top of the levee on their hands and knees and looked over it, the negroes gathered at the landing below did not know that there was anyone near them. There were probably a dozen men, women, and children in the group, and they were lying at their ease on the ground or walking slowly back and forth; but all of them turned their gaze toward the gunboats now and then, as if they were waiting for somebody to come ashore. There were several covered baskets

and pails near by, and the sight of them was enough to enrage Lieutenant Lambert, who whispered to the man who lay next him behind the levee:

“Pass the word along the line fur everybody to keep under kiver. We’ve ketched them niggers red-handed in the very act, fur there’s grub in them buckets and things; now you just watch and see if there aint.” Then he raised his voice a little and said to the nearest darkey: “What you folks doing there? Who you looking fur?”

“Waiting for Mr. Wilcox, sah,” was the negro’s prompt answer. He looked up and saw two or three heads above the top of the levee, but thought nothing of it. There were a good many whites in Baton Rouge who did not dare show themselves as freely to the Yankee sailors as the people of his own color did.

“Who’s Mr. Wilcox?” demanded Lambert.

“He’s de cater ob de steerage mess, sah; de man what buys de breakfus’ fur some of de officers on dat fust boat,” was the reply; and

although Lambert did not understand the words any better than the negro did himself, he gathered from them the idea that somebody on the gunboat would come ashore for his breakfast very shortly, and that he and his warriors had reached the levee just in the nick of time.

This cheering intelligence was passed along the line in a whisper, and the Home Guards pulled off their hats and were settling themselves into comfortable positions behind the levee to await the coming of the caterer's boat, when they were startled by hearing someone close beside them say, in frightened and protesting tones :

“ Gentlemen, *gentlemen*, what are you going to do ? ”

Lambert faced quickly around and saw a couple of citizens standing at the base of the levee where they could observe all that was being done by the Home Guards ; but whether they had come upon his ambush by accident or design the lieutenant did not know or care to ask. He saw the necessity for prompt action.

“Scrooch down right where you stand, so that the Yanks can't see you,” he commanded.

“But what are you gentlemen going to do?” inquired one of the citizens, both of whom obeyed Lambert's order and sank upon their heels with alacrity when they saw the black muzzles of three or four double-barrels swinging in their direction.

“Well, if you can't see fur yourselves what we uns are going to do I reckon I'll have to tell you,” replied the lieutenant of the Home Guards, turning part way around so that he could watch both negroes and citizens at the same time, and see that no signals passed from them to the fleet. “We're goin' to break up the visitin' and tradin' that's been going on between this town and the Yanks till we are tēetotally sick and tired of it. The folks back in the country, who are all good Confederits, don't like it; and me and my men have come in here to say so in a way that both you and the Yanks will understand.”

“Merciful Heaven!” exclaimed the man, who seemed to be almost overcome with as-

tonishment and alarm. "You are not going to fire into those war vessels?"

"What's the reason I aint?" said Lambert coolly. "You just wait till one of their row-boats starts to come ashore and I'll show you."

"But consider for a moment——" began the citizen, his excitement bringing him to his feet.

"Down you go again," interrupted Lambert, drawing his cocked rifle to his shoulder. "We uns have considered the whole business. We know that we can't hurt 'leven inches of iron and four foot of solid oak back of that with we'pons like these we've got, but we can make them blue-jackets mighty juber-some about comin' ashore and being so very friendly with you Baton Rouge folks; and that's what we allow to do."

"In the name of God and humanity I protest against such an outrage!" said one of the men, whose pale face and firmly set lips showed that he would not have stopped with a mere protest if he had possessed the power to do anything else.

"You must not think of it, you madman!"

cried the other. "Don't you know that the boats will return your fire, and that they can knock our town to pieces with a single broadside? There is no telling how many innocent women and children will be killed or maimed through your act of folly."

"Well, then, why didn't you think of all them things before you made friends with the enemies of your country?" answered Lambert. "But the gunboats won't fire on women and children. Leastways they didn't in New Orleans, and the folks in that burg were about as sassy as they could well be."

"If you are determined to carry your crazy scheme into execution, I beg that you will give us a little time to remove our families to a place of safety before you begin," said one of the citizens as he and his companion arose to their feet and turned to go away.

"Not much as anybody knows of, I won't," replied Lambert in savage tones.

"Just five minutes," pleaded the citizen. "Perhaps we can take our wives and little ones into the cellar before you will find it necessary to open fire."

“Not one minute—not one second nor a half of one,” snarled the lieutenant, once more raising his weapon to his shoulder. “I aint a-goin’ to have you shakin’ a handkercher at them boats to warn the Yauks that there’s something wrong here behind the levee. You just squat down where you are till this thing is over, and then you can go any place you please.”

“Watch out, Sile,” said one of the Home Guards suddenly. “There comes that feller after his grub.”

Lieutenant Lambert flopped over on his face as if he had been shot, and saw a small boat, with four men at the oars and two officers sitting in the stern-sheets, come into view from behind one of the war vessels and turn toward the landing.

The time for him to win a name for himself had arrived.

CHAPTER V.

HOW IT RESULTED.

“I WOULDN’T take ten gold dollars fur my chance of being made cap’n of this company of Home Guards, who would have been conscripted to the last man if it hadn’t been fur me,” thought Lieutenant Lambert as he rolled over on his face and watched the cutter rounding the stern of the nearest war vessel. “Look wild, there!” he whispered almost fiercely to his men. “Be sure and hold your fire till they come clost in to the shore so that every shot will tell. I don’t want to hear another word outen you two,” he went on, addressing himself to the citizens, who implored him to stop where he was and not bring destruction upon their town and death to innocent people in it, as he surely would do if he commanded his Home Guards to fire upon that unarmed boat. “You’re too big cowards to fight the enemy yourselves, and so

we uns had to come in here and do it fur you. Hold steady, everybody!"

Although Lambert's men were all hunters and good shots, they were not disciplined soldiers, and that was all that saved the cutter's crew from annihilation. They would have been steady enough if they had been in the woods watching a runway for deer, but watching for Yankees was a different matter altogether; and just as the Home Guards had pushed their guns over the top of the levee, making use of every clod and piece of driftwood and inequality of the ground that came handy for a screen, and Lieutenant Lambert was cautiously lifting his head to observe the progress the small boat was making toward the landing, a deafening roar rang in his ear, and the man at his side sprang to his feet, stood bewildered for a moment, and then dropped back to his place again. In pushing his double-barrel over the levee with nervous hands the valorous Home Guard had accidentally discharged the piece, and the unexpected report frightened him and threw his comrades into some confusion. For an instant

or two a few of them looked and acted as though they wanted to take to their heels; but the voice of Lieutenant Lambert, who was the first to recover himself, checked them.

“Shoot! Fire!” he yelled. “Massy knows ’twon’t do no good, and that is something we can thank you fur, Ike Spencer. A man that’ll lay flat on the ground and let his gun shoot itself off without orders can’t be conscripted any too quick to suit me, and I’ll introjuce you to Cap’n Roach soon’s I get home. Fire, I tell you!”

And the Home Guards fired—not all together like trained soldiers, but one after another, just as it happened; but the distance was so great and their aim so bad that not a man in the boat was injured. It stopped instantly, however, and came no nearer the landing; and on being hailed by the officer of the deck, it turned about and went back to the vessel to which it belonged. Then came the very thing which the frightened citizens had predicted and Lieutenant Lambert had scouted.

No sooner had the small boat disappeared

around the stern of the war ship than a heavy cloud of smoke rolled over the dark, muddy surface of the river, a cannon roared, and the embankment behind which Lieutenant Lambert and his men were lying was jarred perceptibly, as if some heavy body had been dashed with violent force against it. The instant's profound silence that followed was broken, first by shouts and cries of terror from the negroes on the bank, who scattered in all directions, then by a muffled sound something like the puff of a tired locomotive on an up grade, and Lambert's view of the river was shut off by a cloud of dirt and smoke that was thrown high into the air by the explosion of the shell that had buried itself in the ground at the base of the levee. That was enough for the Home Guards, who could not stand so much noise at such close quarters. They jumped to their feet, and fairly tumbled over one another as they fled for safety behind the warehouses where they had left their horses ; but even here vengeance pursued them, for the next shell that came from the war vessel crashed through the walls of the nearest

house, scattering bricks and mortar about their ears, creating a panic among their untrained steeds, and finally exploding in the edge of the woods half a mile away.

“By gum, boys! Jump on and get outen here!” shouted Lambert, who wished from the bottom of his heart that he could be the first to obey his own order. “Beats the world how straight they can shoot with them big guns of theirs. They’d win more turkeys at a shooting match than the best man among us.”

For a few brief, perilous moments the terrified horses refused to stand still long enough for their equally terrified owners to mount; but when, after many fruitless efforts, the Home Guards succeeded in placing themselves in their saddles, the stampede that followed was something we cannot describe. They galloped frantically along the road that ran behind the levee, through the streets of the town, which were by this time filled with pale and excited citizens, who could not imagine what the trouble was about, and did not know which way to run for safety, and so out into

the country, where the avenging shells could not reach them. A Confederate veteran who was present and witnessed the bombardment told the writer that the Home Guards "deliberately rode into the midst of the fleeing inhabitants, selecting groups of terrified women and children, into whom they galloped, trampling many of them under the feet of their horses, trusting that the humane and chivalrous blue-jackets, who had been so lenient with the insulting rabble at New Orleans, would not follow them with their fire." We believe this to be nothing but the truth; but whether it is or not the fact remains that Lambert and his men kept to the crowded streets as long as they could, and the bursting shells followed them through every turn they made, but unfortunately without doing them the least damage. Those who ought to have been severely punished got off scot free, while the innocent inhabitants suffered in wounds and loss of property, for their town was set on fire in half a dozen different places.

The Home Guards spread the utmost consternation among the farmers who lived along

the line of their hurried flight, and who ran out to the road and vainly implored the frantic horsemen to draw rein long enough to tell them what the firing was about, and if the Yankees were coming at last to burn them out of house and home. But it was not until the roar of the big guns ceased entirely, and the Home Guards were satisfied that they had ridden beyond the reach of any stray shell which might be sent after them, that those who were leading in the retreat recovered their courage sufficiently to slacken their speed so that their comrades in the rear could come up. Then they were willing to talk to the planters along the road, but it is doubtful if they gave them much reliable information. In response to one frightened citizen's hurried inquiries, Lieutenant Lambert said :

“ We uns have been in just the worst fight we ever was in before in all our born days, and if anybody but me had been in command the most of us would have left our bones there behind the levee. It was awful to see the way them Yanks fired into them women and children.”

“But what started the rucus in the first place?” asked the planter, who, rebel that he was, could not believe that the blue-jackets had turned demons all on a sudden. “What have you Mooreville ruffians, who haven’t any business in this part of the country anyway, been doing in the city?”

“You better ask what them Baton Rouge Yankees been doing?” retorted Lambert hotly. “We’re State troops, and we’ve got business in every part of the country that we please to go; and when it pleases the Baton Rouge people to start a nest of Yankee sympathizers in there, it’s our bounden duty to go in and break it up. And that’s just what we have done. We’ve drove the enemy away, and the Mississippi between New Orleans and Memphis belongs to we uns once more. We’d a’ whopped ’em worse’n we did if it hadn’t been for Ike Spencer, who let his gun shoot itself off before the rest of us were ready. I reckon he feels kinder sneakin’ over it, fur I aint seen him since.”

“I should think you would all feel sneaking,” answered the planter, as he turned on

his heel and moved away. "If you have kicked up a row on the river I hope you will suffer for it. We've had peace and quiet in this part of the country for a few weeks back, and now you have gone and brought war and all its miseries on us again. The last one of you ought to be hanged."

Lieutenant Lambert and his Home Guards were amazed to find that this angry citizen voiced the sentiments of all the people who lived on the Mooreville road; and after a few more planters had talked to them in this plain fashion their eyes were opened to the disagreeable fact that they had damaged their own cause a great deal more than they had hurt the enemy; and that if their friends and neighbors felt the same way toward them the fire that had been poured into their ranks by the gunboats was nothing to what they would have to stand when they reached home. When they came to think it all over they were the maddest lot of men that had ever been seen in that part of the country. They blamed their lieutenant for being the cause of it, and swore at him so lustily that he fell behind and

rode alone, putting in his time by wishing a good many heavy penalties to the address of his one-legged friend Abner, who, after the experience he had had with Yankees, ought to have known better than to advise him to "pester" the gunboats. All the Home Guards rode slowly, so as to reach the outskirts of Mooreville a little after nightfall, and then they separated and slunk away toward their respective homes like school-boys who had been playing truant. But the news had got ahead of them, and an indignation meeting was being held in the dining room of the hotel. Some of the Mooreville people, Captain Randolph among the number, had seen and talked with men who lived down the river road and had heard the roar of the big guns, and mounted messengers had been sent to the city to learn what the firing was about. These men, who had fast horses and went across lots, rode all the way at top speed, and to such good purpose that they returned to Mooreville about two hours before the Home Guards came straggling in; and the story they told to the crowd at the hotel raised such a storm of

indignation that for a while things looked serious.

In the meantime, and to make matters worse, the news spread through the country round about and armed planters came flocking in to lend assistance in driving back the force that was supposed to be advancing upon Mooreville; and the climax was reached when wagons began arriving from the direction of the river, drawn by panting mules that had been driven until they were almost exhausted, and loaded with the families and household effects of the frightened owners who were fleeing before the invading Federals. Of course the very meagre information these people brought added to the excitement and alarm, for there were not two among them who told the same story. They expected to find the town deserted by its inhabitants, and were much surprised to discover that it was not.

“It’s no use for you fellows to think of standing against them,” exclaimed one trembling driver, who carried in his hand a frayed ox-gad which he had worn out over his mules’

backs. "Butler is coming with his whole army."

"Did you see them?" inquired Mr. Gray, who had ridden in with Ned Griffin for a companion. They were both armed, and although they did not believe in shooting at those who carried the Old Flag, they were ready to do what they could to protect their homes.

"Yes, sir; I saw them," replied the man earnestly. "I hadn't left my house a quarter of a mile behind before I discovered some of their cavalry riding along one of my lanes. I suppose my house is in ashes by this time."

"Were they burning things as they came?" asked one of Mr. Gray's neighbors.

"There was the blackest smoke over toward the river that I ever saw in my life," was the answer. "Baton Rouge is gone up. You'd better leave while you can. You may save your lives, but you can't save your property. Get along there, mule! Me and mine will take to the brush."

Every story to which Mr. Gray and Ned Griffin listened was more thrilling than the one that came before it. Among others they

found a man who lived in the outskirts of the city, and who, standing in his back door, had seen a bench which supported twenty-five stands of bees demolished by a shell from the gunboats. Still another had fled from his house just in time to escape capture by Butler's advance infantry, which was moving up the road in platoon front; and more than that, the highway was blue with Federals as far as his eye could reach. Of course such tales as these frightened some of the Mooreville people, but Mr. Gray assured his young companion that he put very little reliance upon them.

“These folks are not responsible for what they tell us, because they are scared out of their wits,” was what he said to Ned Griffin more than once. “What would the Federals gain by capturing or destroying two little towns like Baton Rouge and Mooreville? If there was a fort or a body of Confederate troops here I might put some faith in these rumors; but now I don't. When our couriers return we shall have the straight of the story, and not before. Have you seen anything of

our Home Guards, who ought to be mustering for our defence?"

No, Ned hadn't seen them; and when he came to ride about the town and make inquiries he could not find anybody else who had seen them. The truth was they were too badly frightened to show themselves, for they were afraid that they might be called upon to do something. Captain Tom's uniform was in its old hiding place in the garret, and Tom himself was stretched out on the lounge in his mother's room, eager for news and dreading to hear it, but too ill to mount his horse and muster his men for the defence of the town.

At length two of the Mooreville messengers returned, and then the citizens got "the straight of the story." When they learned that General Butler's army had not moved out of New Orleans at all, that not a Federal soldier had stepped upon the sacred soil of Louisiana in the neighborhood of Baton Rouge during the whole of that day, and that the city had been shelled and partially burned because Lieutenant Lambert of Tom Randolph's Home Guards had tried to gain a

little cheap notoriety for himself by firing upon an unarmed boat—when the citizens heard this their fear give way to the wildest rage; and if they could have got their hands upon Lambert at that moment it is more than probable that they would have handled him roughly. With one accord the crowd surged up the steps that led to the hotel porch and through the wide hall into the dining room, which was quickly filled with men who had about made up their minds that the Home Guards had made them trouble enough, and that it would be a good plan to get rid of them without loss of time.

“Of all the senseless acts I ever heard of this last one of Lambert’s is the best,” shouted an excited individual who had perched himself upon one of the tables. . “Those Baton Rouge people knew what they wanted, and if it suited them to make friends with the Yankees and trade with them we planters have no business to find any fault with them for it. I would have done the same thing myself.”

“Oh, you traitor!” shouted a voice from

the farther end of the dining room. "Would you hold communication with the enemies of your flag?"

"You shut up, Bill Cummings," retorted the speaker. "If I am a traitor you're another. You've got a sack of Federal salt and some Federal tea and coffee hidden in one of your corn cribs at this moment, and I can prove it. You got them by trading a beef to one of the gunboats down there at Baton Rouge, and you brought them home in your wagon at dead of night, when you thought all your neighbors were fast asleep."

This raised a shout of laughter at the expense of Bill Cummings, but no one said a harsh word to him, for probably there were not a dozen men in the room who would not have been glad to get some of that salt and tea and coffee. Mr. Gray himself was standing in a pair of Federal brogans, and the man next him wore a straw hat that looked exactly like those that Uncle Sam issued to his sailors every month.

"Now, then," continued the man who had taken possession of the table, "I am in

favor of taking that ruffian Lambert out of his bed, if he has had time to get there, and giving him such a whipping that he won't get over it as long as the war lasts."

"Let's hang him and be done with him," cried another.

"And while we are dealing with Lambert, don't let's forget Tom Randolph," shouted a third.

"Tom Randolph is in no way to blame for what happened at Baton Rouge," said Mr. Gray, who was one of the few cool and reasonable men there were in the crowd. "He has no more authority over the Home Guards than I have."

"Then I say let's lick him because he hasn't some authority over them so that he can make them behave themselves. What did he organize the company for, anyhow?"

"That is what I should like to know. Now mark my words: there will be a Yankee garrison in Baton Rouge in less than a week, and then our trading will be up stump, for we can't go there any more."

"That's so. What excuse has that man

Lambert for living, I'd like to know? Let's bu'st him and the Home Guards up right here and now."

Uttering wild yells of approval, with which were mingled loud calls for ropes and dire threats against the peace of mind and bodily comfort of Captain Tom Randolph, the crowd made a rush for the door, and it was several minutes before Mr. Gray and the cool-headed men who sided with him could make themselves heard above the tumult.

"Be reasonable, gentlemen," urged the former. "Don't let your excitement lead you to do something you will be heartily ashamed of and sorry for to-morrow. You cannot touch those men in the way you suggest, especially Tom Randolph, who is a State officer. Whoop and yell about it all you please," he continued, after the angry shouts of dissent which these words called forth had subsided, "but it is a fact that Tom holds a commission from the Governor, and if you put your hands on him you will go to jail to pay for it. Confederate officers might deal with him, though on that point I am not

sure ; but private citizens certainly cannot."

These warning words caused a dissension in the ranks of the would-be lynchers at once, and the hubbub that arose all over the room, as well as from the outside, where there was a respectable gathering that had not been able to gain admittance to the dining hall, was almost deafening. Mr. Gray looked troubled as he saw his angry neighbors swaying back and forth and shaking their clenched hands in one another's faces, and presently he stooped and whispered a few hasty words to Ned Griffin, who, after a terrific struggle, managed to work his way through the crowd to the nearest window, by which he made his exit from the building. He was charged with an important duty, and he was anxious to discharge it without loss of time ; but the men on the outside insisted on detaining him until he told what was going on in the dining room.

"Honor bright, there isn't anything going on in there that would interest you or anybody else," declared Ned, who knew full well that it would never do to say that there was

some talk of lynching Lieutenant Lambert and "bu'sting up" Tom Randolph. "Mr. Gray has been quoting some law, that's all. Let me go, please. I want to tell Mrs. Gray that the excitement is all over."

The men released him and Ned made his way to the hitching rack where he had left his horse, mounted, and galloped off. He made a great show of riding down the road toward Mr. Gray's house, but as soon as he thought he could do so without attracting attention he turned back, and went at top speed toward the plantation on which Lieutenant Lambert found employment as overseer. Paying no heed to the small army of dogs that came out to dispute his advance he rode close to the door of the overseer's house, there being no porch to bar his way, and tapped lightly upon it with the handle of his riding-whip. If he had made a good deal of noise it is probable that he would not have received any response from the solitary occupant of the building, who was thoroughly frightened at what he had done, but totally ignorant of the fact that his life would be in danger if Mr. Gray and his friends failed

in their efforts to control the mob at the hotel. The cautious way in which his visitor strove to attract his attention told him that there was something afoot, and he thought it best to answer.

“Who’s there?” he demanded, his voice sounding as if it came from under the bed-clothes.

“It’s I—Ned Griffin,” was the reply. “Come to the door so that I can say a word to you without fear of being overheard, and be quick about it. There’s not an instant to lose.”

This startling announcement brought Lambert out of bed and to the door, which he opened just wide enough to make sure that his visitor was Ned Griffin, and nobody else; and then he opened it so that he could put his head out and look up and down the lane that ran by the house to the negro quarter.

“I am alone,” Ned assured him without waiting to be questioned, “and I am here because Mr. Gray sent me. Do you know what you have done by this day’s work? You have destroyed a good portion of Baton Rouge and

got every white man in the settlement down on you.”

“I never——” began Lambert, who was profoundly astonished.

“I am not here to argue the matter,” interrupted Ned, “but to tell you that there is a mob in the hotel who are talking strongly of laying violent hands on you. They would have been here before this time if it hadn’t been for Mr. Gray and a few others who don’t believe in such things; but the gang was about equally divided when Mr. Gray sent me to warn you, and you had better dig out. They are as likely to decide on one thing as another, and you are not safe in this house.”

“Great smoke!” gasped Lambert when he began to comprehend the situation. “Where shall I go?”

“Get into your duds and draw a bee-line for the nearest patch of timber. Mr. Gray may be able to hold the mob and he may not; so I say again that you had better dig out.”

“I never looked for you to be so good to me, Ned,” faltered Lambert, who seemed to be

NED GRIFFIN WARNING LAMBERT.



so dazed that he did not realize the necessity of acting quickly.

“Don’t thank me ; thank Mr. Gray,” said Ned hastily. “If it had not been for him I am afraid I should have left you to look out for yourself ; for I know how you and Tom Randolph have been working against me. But you can’t injure me now, and so I can afford to be magnanimous. Are you going to clear out or not ?”

Yes, Lambert thought he had better take a friend’s advice and seek safety in flight while the way was open to him ; and when Ned heard him say that he wheeled his horse and set off post-haste to carry the same warning and advice to another party whose name had that night been rather unpleasantly mentioned in connection with a sound thrashing. This one was Tom Randolph, who heard his ring at the door but lacked the courage to answer it, for something told him that he would hear disagreeable news if he did. Mr. Randolph answered the bell himself, and the words he listened to almost drove him frantic. Ned did not tell him that the mob had threatened to whip Tom, for, as

he afterward said, he couldn't get his consent to go as far as that ; but he said enough to put Mr. Randolph into a terrible state of mind. He stamped his feet on the gallery, shook his fists over his head, and wished from the bottom of his heart that every member of the Home Guards had been sent to the front and killed off long ago, and then he went in to tell his wife about it, and leave her to break the news to Tom in any way she thought best. To say that the young man was utterly confounded would be putting it very mildly. He was terribly frightened, of course, and angry as well ; but for some reason or other he did not seem to stand so much in fear of personal violence as he did of losing his commission. When his mother had repeated word for word the conversation that took place between Ned Griffin and Mr. Randolph, and Tom had asked a question or two, he jumped to his feet and charged about the room like a caged wild animal.

“There isn't a man in the world who has half the trouble I do,” he said, almost tearfully. “That idiot Lambert has broken up

the company as completely as though the Yankees had come in and captured every member of it."

"And think of the misery he has brought upon the Baton Rouge people," suggested his mother.

"I don't care a picayune for the Baton Rouge people," said Tom in savage tones. "They ought to have known that they would bring themselves into trouble by being so friendly with the Yankees; but all the same Lambert showed himself a born fool when he fired on that gunboat. I should be glad to see him and every man who went with him conscripted and put where they would have to behave themselves, if I could only get others to fill their places; but that is something I can't do. And if I lose my men I shall have to throw up my commission or go into the army. When I meet them at the enrolling office in the morning I will talk to them in a way they will remember."

But when morning dawned upon his sight after a restless and sleepless night, the captain of the Home Guards had several other

things to occupy his mind. First came a committee of twelve stalwart men appointed by the indignant citizens of Baton Rouge, who called at Mr. Randolph's house to inquire what Tom meant by sending a gang of ruffians to their peaceful city to bring destruction upon it, and death and wounds to its quiet inhabitants, in that wanton, useless, and outrageous manner. The scathing denunciation and threats that Captain Tom was obliged to listen to before he and his mother could convince the visitors that he was in no way to blame for it, that he did not know the first thing about it until it was all over, and that the Home Guards had acted on their own responsibility and without orders from him, were things he never forgot; and the only way he could pacify the committee, who seemed determined to have revenge upon somebody before they left town, was by promising to turn his company over to the conscripting officer as soon as he could get to his office. Tom knew when he said it that his Home Guards would refuse to be disposed of in that way, but he was so much afraid of

the Baton Rouge men and so anxious to see the last of them, that he would have promised more than that for the sake of inducing them to leave the house.

Although Tom did not know it until afterward, the committee took a little responsibility from his shoulders by calling at Kimberly's store before they went home and telling Captain Roach, in the hearing of some of the Home Guards, that if he did not at once conscript every man who was in any way concerned in Lambert's mad act they would petition the Governor to remove him and put in his place an officer who would attend to his business. And this threat of theirs was what brought some of the Home Guards to Captain Tom's house, where we found them at the beginning of the first chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN ROACH LAYS DOWN THE LAW.

AS soon as the Baton Rouge men with their lowering looks and big revolvers were fairly out of sight of the house Captain Tom, feeling much the worse for the exciting ordeal through which he had just passed, went into his mother's room and flung himself down on the lounge with the air of a man who had nothing in the world to live for. There wasn't another captain in the Confederacy, he told himself, whose ambition to do something great for his country had been balked and defeated at every turn as his had been ever since he took command of the Home Guards. In no single instance that he could think of had his men conducted themselves as he thought they ought, or as he was sure Captain Hubbard's Rangers would have conducted themselves if they had been situated as the Home Guards were, and it was a sad disappointment and

trial to him. Already he repented of his rash promise to turn his company over to the enrolling officer, for by such a proceeding he would place himself right where he was before the Governor honored him with his commission—that is to say, without any standing at all in the community. Now he had influence and he was not ignorant of the fact. It was very gratifying to his vanity to have men who were his superiors in every point of view, who had seldom invited him to their houses or treated him with anything more than ordinary civility—it was very gratifying to have such men go out of their way to speak to him, and to see them listen attentively while he discussed the issues of the hour, and told how the war ought to be conducted on the Confederate side. The most of these men in their hearts despised him, and Captain Tom knew it; but they were aware that through his intimacy with Captain Roach he was able to hasten or postpone their conscription, just as the humor seized him, and for this reason thought it prudent to treat him with some show of respect. But if he gave his company

over to the enrolling officer, or if Captain Roach were relieved and a new and stricter man put in his place——

“Ow! *Ow!*” yelled the persecuted and furious captain of the Home Guards when these dispiriting reflections passed through his mind; and with the words he sprang from the lounge to the middle of the room, where he swung his arms and danced about like one demented. “No matter what I decide to do I am in a fix. But I’ll never give up my company—never in this world. I am the biggest toad in the puddle now and I am going to stay that way, or else I’ll go to Baton Rouge and curry favor with the Yankees, as other good Confederates have done to keep out of trouble. Jeff Davis can’t reach inside their lines and take me by the collar and drag me into his army. And as for Roach, if he gets up on his dignity and says ugly things to me on account of Lambert’s foolishness, I’ll let him know who he is talking to. I’ll report him myself for—for incompetency and general worthlessness. He’s about as fit to be an enrolling officer as Adam’s off ox. At any rate

he shall never sit at my mother's table again, and he can bet on that."

At this moment Mrs. Randolph, who had done so much to help Captain Tom through his trying interview with the Baton Rouge committee, hastened into the room looking very much excited and distressed.

"My dear," said she nervously, "I am afraid we are going to have more trouble. There is a score or more of Home Guards in the road coming toward the house, and they are talking loudly and shaking their fists at one another as if they are very angry."

"I don't care if they are," shouted Captain Tom. "I am mad too, as I have good reason to be. Stand by me and see how I will talk to them."

Money would not have induced Captain Randolph to go out on the gallery alone to meet his mutinous soldiers, and even with his fearless mother at his side to support and encourage him he felt like running back into the house when he saw them coming through the gate and heard their loud, angry voices. Whether they intended to do him

personal injury Tom never knew for certain, though he afterward heard it hinted that they did ; but he was much gratified and relieved to observe that they ceased all hostile demonstrations when they saw his mother standing by his side on the gallery ; and that emboldened him to go on with the programme he had laid out for himself.

“You are a pretty lot of soldiers—a very pretty lot indeed,” was the way in which he went at them. “I am heartily ashamed of you and disgusted with myself to think I ever consented to act as your commanding officer. Do you know that you have done us and our glorious cause more injury than Farragut ever did ? Men have been shot to death in the Army of the Centre for doing less than you have done, and now I am going to put you where you will be served in the same way the first time you misbehave yourselves. I shall stand your foolishness no longer. The field is the place for you, and there’s where you are going as soon as Captain Roach can send you.”

“Cap’n Roach can’t send us there, nor you neither,” shouted Lambert, who of course was

expected to act as spokesman for the Home Guards. "We are sworn into the service of the State, we are, and Confedrit officers can't touch us. Didn't Bob Hubbard's Rangers——"

"I can send you to the front to pay you for what you did yesterday, and I will," interrupted Captain Tom. "There are no such useless things as States troops any longer, and I am glad of it. Ask Captain Roach and he will tell you that you are here only because I asked him to let you stay, and that if the camp of instruction we are waiting for had been established I could have sent you there any day I pleased. I have been standing between you and him all along, and this is the way you repay me, you ungrateful blackguards! I'll teach you to play the part of fools without my orders."

Lieutenant Lambert rubbed his hands nervously together, shaking his head and swearing softly to himself the while, and fairly ached to make a suitable rejoinder; but the presence of Tom's mother, of whom he had always stood somewhat in awe, restrained him.

“We uns thought you was dead set agin the Yankees, and that you would be sorter glad to see them sailors made to stay on their boats,” one of the Home Guards ventured to say at length.

“What business had you to think anything of the kind?” demanded Captain Tom. “A soldier’s whole duty is to obey. He is nothing but a machine and his captain does his thinking for him. If I had wanted you to go to the city and fire on those gunboats I should have led you there myself. Lambert, you alone are to blame for this miserable state of affairs, and I will tell you for your satisfaction that you have killed your chances for a lieutenant’s commission deader than a smelt. I’ll never recommend you to the Governor.”

“By gum! I won’t stand no such talk as that!” yelled Lambert.

He sprang into the air and knocked his heels together, dashed his hat upon the ground and placed his foot upon the lower step, as if he were about to rush up to the gallery where Tom was standing. The latter’s face grew as white as a sheet, but he could not think of

yielding ground to a mutinous subordinate while his mother was looking on. In an instant the sword that hung at his side flashed from its scabbard.

“I haven’t drawn it without a cause,” said he, shaking the weapon over the railing almost in Lambert’s face, “and I warn you that I shall not sheathe it with dishonor. That is my motto, and I shall live up to it, no matter what happens to me. Any more such actions on your part will shut you up in the guard-house on a bread and water diet.”

It is not likely that the sight of Tom’s sword or the threat which he could not have carried out had any effect upon Lieutenant Lambert, who was a noted rough and tumble fighter, but a glance at the face of the resolute woman who stood quietly on the porch above cowed him at once. Mrs. Randolph did not say a word, nor did she move an inch when Lambert acted as though he was about to charge up the steps, but there was something in her eye that brought the angry man to his senses. He backed away from the steps, picked up his hat,

and remarked that he had always supposed a first lieutenant had a right to harass the enemy in any way he could ; but he was rebuked and silenced before he had uttered half a dozen words because he forgot his manners and addressed his commanding officer by his Christian name.

Captain Tom was not slow to improve the advantage he had gained, and the way he scolded, threatened, and even insulted the Home Guards would have made a regular soldier open his eyes. He showed them that they did wrong when they followed Lambert to Baton Rouge without orders from their captain, and drew so harrowing a picture of the dangers and privations of the army life to which they had doomed themselves by their acts of disobedience and folly that he frightened the bravest of them ; and when he thought he had impressed them sufficiently he wound up by declaring that nothing short of a solemn promise on their part to do better in future would induce him to break the agreement he had made with the Baton Rouge men. If they would take orders from him and

nobody else he would stand between them and all harm.

“And mark my words, this is the very last warning I shall give you,” said Captain Tom in conclusion. “The last one of you ought to be court-martialled and shot.”

To his great surprise and his mother's Lieutenant Lambert stepped forward, assumed the position of a soldier as near as he could get it, touched his battered hat respectfully, and said :

“We'll do it, cap'n, and there's my hand on to it, if Miss Randolph will take it. From this time on you're boss and don't nary one of you forget it.”

Lambert's object was to restore himself to the favor of Tom's mother ; and so he went on to declare, with some emphatic language to make it more binding, that he spoke for the company and would take it upon himself to see that the promise was kept. He was sure he had succeeded in his object when Mrs. Randolph smiled and shook hands with him over the railing, but all the same Lambert meant something very different from what he said.

Captain Tom made a life-long enemy when he drew his sword on his second officer, and all the latter wanted was an opportunity to show it. Tom then dismissed his men with the assurance that he would do the best he could for them, and went into the house congratulating himself on having won a complete victory.

“I have had the narrowest escape of my life this morning,” were the first words he said to his mother. “The next time I come so near to going into the army I shall go; and that will be the last you will ever see of Tom Randolph. Didn’t I bring Lambert to time when I drew my sword on him? He’s had an idea that he could run things to suit himself, but I think I showed him his mistake. Of course it will not be safe for me to go near Baton Rouge, for I believe the citizens would mob me; but I can’t be sent to a conscript camp so long as I have men to command, and that is what I am figuring on now.”

Half an hour later, and before Captain Tom had finished telling his mother and himself that he was well out of the scrape into which his officious lieutenant had brought him, one

of the Home Guards rode into the yard with a note from Captain Roach, in which the latter requested Tom to come to his office at once on business of the last importance. The young man was frightened again; but the idea of talking over matters with Captain Roach while his mother was not by to support him was not to be entertained for a moment. He passed the note over to her after he had read it, and said almost fiercely to the bearer:

“Tell Captain Roach that he has forgotten himself—that I am his senior; and if he is so anxious to see me he must come where I am. At the present time I am not dancing attendance upon him or anybody else.”

“One moment, my dear,” Mrs. Randolph interposed. “A written invitation demands the courtesy of a written reply. Permit me to answer the captain. I will show you the note before sending it away.”

His mother went into the house and Captain Tom said to the Home Guard, who sat on his horse at the foot of the steps:

“Have you any idea what Roach wants of me?”

“I reckon it’s something or ’nother about them men from Baton Rouge, who acted like they wanted to bu’st things,” replied the messenger. “Looks to me like the cap’n feels sorter shook up over what they said to him, and that he’s got himself into some kind of a muss that nobody but you can help him out of. He talks like he’s going to send we uns to camp. Can you shet him off on that, do you reckon?”

“It depends entirely upon the way you Home Guards conduct yourselves from this time on,” answered Captain Tom impressively. “Roach would have conscripted you long ago if I hadn’t stood your friend, and he may do it yet if you follow Lambert on any more of his crazy expeditions.”

“I didn’t foller,” said the man hastily, “and I don’t want you to think I did. I was to home all the blessed time. I aint caring to bother the Yankees so long as they let me be. And Lambert, he won’t go off that away agin. He was purty bad skeared last night.”

“What at?” inquired Tom.

“Why, don’t you know? Some of our

folks went down to the river yesterday to see what all that shooting was about, and when they come back and told what Lambert had been a-doing, ole man Gray and the rest of 'em was that mad that they talked of hanging Lambert up to a tree and licking you like you was a nigger."

Captain Tom reeled as if the man had struck him with the handle of the heavy riding-whip he carried in his hand, and grasped at the veranda railing for support.

"I am telling you nothing but the gospel truth," continued the messenger, not a little surprised at the effect his words had produced upon his commanding officer, "and I thought you had had time to hear all about it. They was a tol'able mad lot of men down to the hotel last night, and when I seen 'em going on I was mighty glad I hadn't went with Lambert and the rest."

"Do you mean to say that old man Gray dared to talk of whipping *me*?" exclaimed Tom, who could hardly believe his ears. "Wasn't it Lambert he spoke of?"

“No, it was you ; and he wasn’t the only one who spoke of it, nuther,” replied the Home Guard. “They was all mad, I tell you, and some of them was for hanging Lambert.”

“I wish to goodness they had,” said Captain Tom, speaking before he thought. “That is to say, I wish they had done something to him before he brought me into all this trouble. Was that what frightened him ?”

“You’re mighty right, and he took to the bresh as soon as he got wind of it. But he come out this morning and we all have promised to stand by him. If they put a ugly hand on one of the company we uns allow to burn them out.”

“That’s the idea !” cried Tom, who never would have thought of such a thing himself. “I see very plainly that we’ve got to do something to protect ourselves. We are State troops, and if these cowardly citizens drive us to it we will treat them as we would the armed enemies of our country if we could only get at them. We’ll begin on old man Gray and never let up until we’ve destroyed everything he’s got. No man who dares to

threaten me and those who serve under me shall hold up his head as high—— Sh! Here comes my mother. Don't say a word in her hearing, but tell Lambert I'll see him after a while and arrange a plan of operations with him."

Just then Mrs. Randolph came out on the porch with the note she had written, and which she presented for Tom's approval. It was not written in his name, but in her own. She said she regretted that her son did not feel able to accept the captain's kind invitation, owing to the excitement and distress of mind into which he had been thrown by the unfortunate occurrences of the last few hours, but if Captain Roach would honor her by coming up to dinner at the usual hour she hoped he would find Captain Randolph so far recovered that he would be able to talk over with him the very important business to which Captain Roach had referred in his note.

The result of this piece of strategy was that an open rupture between Captain Tom and the conscript officer was avoided; and when

the latter, who had been so frightened and angered by the threats of the Baton Rouge committee that he was several times on the point of doing something desperate, came up to dinner "at the usual hour," he was the same pleasant and agreeable fellow he had always been. But he found Captain Tom lying on the sofa in dressing-gown and slippers, and looking the picture of misery. Before he advanced to take the limp palm that Tom languidly extended he stopped in the middle of the room and asked if someone had been laying violent hands upon him. To be candid he thought it would be a good thing for Tom if the citizens would shake him up a little.

"No, sir," was the very dignified reply. "Physical pain would not do a Randolph up in this way. It is purely mental anguish; and my honor has been touched. I little thought that I should ever permit living men to talk as those Baton Rouge ruffians talked to me this morning without promptly calling them to account for it. But my Home Guards were clearly in the wrong when they fired upon

that boat without my orders, so what could I say or do ? ”

Captain Roach, who had had plenty of time to cool off and recover his courage since he wrote that note, smiled pleasantly, gave Tom's hand a cordial shake, pulled up a chair, and said that the committee had been quite as savage with himself as they had been with his friend Tom, and that he had thought it the part of wisdom to comply with their demands when he saw that they carried revolvers in their coat-pockets, and were in just the right mood to use them. He said that he had conscripted all the Home Guards except Tom, as he had agreed to do, because he did not see how he could help himself. It would be very little trouble for the Baton Rouge people, with the aid of Rodney Gray's father and a score of others whose names the captain could mention, to keep watch of the way things were done at the enrolling office, and if he failed to keep his promise they would be sure to find it out ; but he had conscripted the Home Guards conditionally. If they would behave themselves in future and take orders from their

captain instead of their first lieutenant he would not send them to camp until the last minute, and not at all if he could help it; but the first man who kicked out of the traces would be the first to be sent to the front. Lambert and the rest understood this perfectly, and had agreed to be bound by his decision.

“That’s the idea!” cried Captain Tom, delighted to learn that at last he had his refractory men right where he wanted them. “That’s the way to bring mutineers to time. There will be no more trouble of this kind, I assure you, for I talked to some of my troops very plainly this morning, and made Lambert knuckle in a way that would have surprised you if you could have seen it. Of course I shall have to steer clear of Baton Rouge, but I don’t care much for that; although I confess it nettles me to feel that I cannot go and come when I please, as I have always been in the habit of doing.”

Mrs. Randolph remained in the room long enough to assure herself that the relations existing between Captain Roach and her son had

not been strained by the events of the morning, and then, bestowing an approving smile upon each, she arose and went out; whereupon Captain Tom got upon his feet and carefully closed the door behind her.

“Say!” he whispered when he came back and resumed his position on the sofa, “did you know that the town was in possession of a mob last night, and that some Yankee sympathizers among them had the impudence to threaten me and my man Lambert?”

“I know all about it,” replied Captain Roach, an expression of anxiety settling on his face. “But they were not Yankee sympathizers, for men of that stamp would not dare open their heads in this community. They were as good Confederates as you or I.”

“Don’t you believe any such stuff,” exclaimed Tom. “There isn’t a word of truth in it. I know that Rodney Gray is a low-down private in our army (he isn’t considered worthy of a commission), but his father’s loyalty has always been suspected, and last night he proposed that his gang of blackguards should whip me and hang Lambert. Now I

tell you that a man who talks that way about me——”

“Somebody has told you what isn't so,” interrupted Captain Roach. “Such a proposition was made last night, but Mr. Gray would not hear to it. He and a few others talked it down on the spot.”

“Well, it's a good thing for old Gray that he did, and if he knows when he is watching his own interests he will take pains to keep it talked down,” said Captain Tom fiercely. “I was ready for him, and if you hadn't told me what you have he would have lost some of his buildings this very night.”

The enrolling officer had seldom been so surprised and startled. He looked fixedly at Tom to see if he was in earnest, and then cried out in alarm :

“Do you know what you are saying? Are you crazy?”

“I know what I am saying and I am not crazy,” was Tom's answer. “I have been threatened with a nigger's punishment, and I never will rest easy until the man who proposed the thing suffers for it.”

“But you don’t know who proposed it and neither do I.”

“No matter. I’ll make it my business to find out.”

“And if you succeed are you going to burn some buildings?”

“I am, most decidedly.”

“You have fully made up your mind to that, have you?”

“I have.”

“Please present my compliments to your mother when she returns, and say to her that I could not stop to dinner,” exclaimed Captain Roach, rising to his feet and reaching for his cap.

“What is the matter with you? Where are you going in such a hurry?” Tom almost gasped.

“I am going to my office, and the first hard work I shall do after I get there will be to put it out of your power to ruin yourself and your father and mother, as you seem bent on doing,” answered the captain; and there was a look of quiet determination on his face that Tom had never seen there before. “Of course

you do not intend to do this incendiary work alone (you haven't got pluck enough for that," the captain added to himself), "so I shall make all haste to send your men into the army where they can't help you. They will be the death of you if I don't."

"And must I let a man talk about whipping me as if I were a nigger and never do or say the first thing about it?" cried Tom, throwing himself back upon the pillow and covering his face with his hands. "I am not made of that sort of stuff, and I did not think a Confederate officer would advise me to such a cowardly course."

"What would you call a thing in the shape of a man who would sneak up on another's property, in the dead of night when there was no one to oppose him, and touch a match to it?" exclaimed Captain Roach hotly. "Would you call him a coward or not?"

"I don't care," whined Tom. "I am bound to have revenge on the man who dared to say that I ought to be whipped, and I won't give up my plan."

"You'll have to take the consequences;

and if you don't promise right here and now that you will be governed by me in future, I will go out of this house and never enter it again ; and you know well enough what that means. I am not going to let you send me to the army in disgrace if I can help it."

"Sit down a minute," said Tom, seeing that the captain stood ready to carry out his threat to leave the house. "I don't see how the burning of a cotton-gin or two will disgrace you or anybody else."

"Yes, you do ; for I have explained it to you more than a hundred times. Mr. Gray and some others are almost ready to report me now for my failure to make you and your worthless men take your chances with the other conscripts, and the minute somebody begins to lose property that minute I shall be ordered away from here and into the army ; and wouldn't that put me in disgrace, I'd like to know ?"

"What's the use of my being captain of the Home Guards if I can't call upon my men to protect me ?" cried Tom, who would have given something to be alone for about five

minutes so that he might have found relief in a flood of tears.

“There isn’t a bit of use in it,” replied the enrolling officer bluntly, “except that it keeps you out of the army with my help. Your commission gives you no authority to call upon the members of a State organization to avenge your supposed private wrongs.”

“Well—why don’t you sit down?” repeated Tom.

“I will when I have your promise, and not before. If you have laid your plans to get me into a muss with the Governor, I must head you off if I can.”

“Then I will make no effort to wipe out the disgrace that has been put upon me as long as you remain in town,” said Tom very reluctantly. “But after you leave I’ll make some people I know of wish they had spoken of Captain Randolph with more respect. Now sit down and act like yourself.”

“You ought to go straight to Mr. Gray and thank him; for if he and his friends had not stood by you last night you might have been badly treated,” answered Captain Roach,

placing his cap on the table again and resuming his seat by Tom's side. "You and I do not want to go into the army, and you must see that, in order to keep out of it, it will be necessary for you to follow a different course from the one you have marked out for yourself. If I am reported for neglect of duty the jig will be up with you."

"Then I must lie around and do nothing, must I?"

"Is there anything else you can do with safety? You can ride about the country at the head of your Home Guards occasionally, just to let the Union men see that you are keeping up your organization, and after I receive word that the camp of instruction has been established, you can take the conscripts there as fast as I can get them together; and that's about all you can do."

"It's a dog's life compared with what I thought a partisan's life would be," growled Tom, "and perhaps it isn't safe for me to ride about the country. The threats that were made against me last night——"

"Will amount to nothing, I assure you,"

interrupted Captain Roach. "The hot-heads who made them and who seemed to be so fierce for a fuss are few in number, and have had time to recover their senses since then. You can't find a man in town who will say that he was willing to go with the rabble last night; and more than that, the order-loving people in the community would not stand by and see a mob run things to suit themselves. You saw Lambert this morning, didn't you? Well, he goes around as freely as he ever did, and no one says a word to him."

Captain Tom thought of the compact that Lambert and the rest of the Home Guards had made to stand by one another in case of trouble with the citizens, but thought it best to say nothing about it to his friend Roach. Of course he had to give the required promise over and over again before the conscript officer became satisfied of his sincerity, and he did it with apparent willingness; but all the while he was telling himself that the men who had threatened to whip him as if he were a nigger, no matter who they were, would hear from him some day, and in a way they would not

like. It took a great load off his mind to know that he would not be mobbed as soon as he showed himself in Mooreville. In fact it cured his "excitement and distress of mind" in a very few minutes; and when his mother returned at the end of half an hour he had discarded his gown and slippers, and was sitting up dressed in his full uniform.

CHAPTER VII.

A PERPLEXING SITUATION.

WHEN Captain Roach went to his office that evening, after the best dinner he had ever eaten in that house, Tom Randolph rode down with him; and before he had gone half a mile was able to tell himself that he had been borrowing trouble and without reason. He saw no coldness whatever in the greetings of those he met along the road, and the few who stopped to speak with him about the occurrences of the previous day declared with one accord that they did not lay any blame at his door; but the way they denounced and threatened Lieutenant Lambert was a pleasant thing for Tom to hear.

“That man’s election wasn’t legal any way,” was what Tom always said in reply. “But because I have permitted him to act as my second in command he has somehow got it into his head that he is a bigger man than I

am, and has a right to do as he pleases. If he has at last found out that I know a trifle more than he does, and that it is a soldier's place to wait for orders from his superior, it will be a good thing for Lambert. If the Baton Rouge people want those gunboats driven away from their town and will send me word, I will go down and do the work for them as it ought to be done."

Tom knew that he was quite safe in talking in this lofty way, for he had learned during his interview with the committee that the people of Baton Rouge would not look kindly upon or support any effort that was made to drive the boats away. As long as they were let alone the Yankees were not unpleasant fellows to have around. They put good food into the mouths of some of the city people, good hats and shoes on their heads and feet, and good money in their pockets, and were on the whole more desirable neighbors than their own enlisted men would have been, for the latter had nothing to give in exchange for garden produce and milk and butter and eggs. But the energetic manner in which they went

to work to scatter Lambert's Home Guards proved that these peaceable gunboat men were ready to fight at a moment's notice.

Captain Tom's courage and importance came back to him rapidly when he found that the situation was by no means as serious as he had supposed it to be ; and when he saw that even Lambert was willing to acknowledge his authority, he came to the conclusion that that indignation meeting at the hotel, and the visit of the Baton Rouge committee, were the best things that could have happened to him and the Home Guards. He found Lambert in his usual loafing place in Kimberly's store. Indeed the man was afraid to go very far away from there, for there was no telling what might be said and done against him if he should absent himself. He saluted Captain Tom respectfully, and followed him out of the back door in obedience to a motion of his finger.

“Look here, lieutenant,” said Tom, when they were alone together, “I do not in the least blame you for saying that you would like to see Rodney Gray's father burned out

to pay him for what he said against you last night, but——”

“Somebody’s been a-lying on me,” exclaimed Lambert, looking alarmed. “I never said no such stuff.”

“Oh, what is the use of denying it to a friend?” said Tom, with most unbecoming familiarity. “But I don’t ask whether you intend to burn him out or not. What I want to say is, that you must on no account think of it so long as Captain Roach stays here. If you do you will get him into trouble with the Governor, and he will pay you for it by sending you and all the men to the front.”

“And you too?” asked Lambert.

“He can’t conscript a commissioned officer, can he?” said Tom, in reply. “No, he can’t do that; and if you will promise that you will never do another thing without my express orders, I will see that he doesn’t conscript you, either.”

“All right, cap’n. I knuckle to you. That’s what I said this morning, and I meant it. I’ll move when you say the word and not before.”

“If you had made that sensible resolution long ago you would have saved yourself and me from insult,” said Tom, looking at his lieutenant as if he would like to give him another piece of his mind. “If you have learned that I am the head of the company I am glad of it; but if you want to do anything to old man Gray on your own hook—on your own hook, I said—why, that is a matter with which I have nothing to do. However, you must wait until Roach leaves Mooreville.”

So saying, Captain Tom saluted and went into the office. When the door closed behind him Lambert shook both his clenched hands at it, and said through his tightly shut teeth :

“That’s a matter you have nothing to do with, is it? Well, I reckon it is; and you don’t get Sile Lambert into a furse with no such oily words as them. I know what you want mighty well, but I just aint a-going to do it. You can pester ole man Gray yourself if you feel like it, and when the job is done I’ll tell him where to find the chap who done it. I’ll learn you to keep my commission

from me and pull a sword on me besides, the way you done this morning. By gum! If I wasn't afeared I'd go and make friends with the Yankees the way the Baton Rouge folks do. I'll risk it any way before I will let myself be conscripted."

HAVING weathered this storm without suffering very much damage except so far as his feelings were concerned, and quiet having been restored in the community, Captain Tom settled back into his old lazy way of passing the time, and waited for something exciting to happen. The first news out of the ordinary that came to his ears was that Baton Rouge had been occupied by Federal troops, much to the gratification of the citizens, both Union and Confederate, who experienced so delightful a sense of security when they saw the blue-coats on their streets that they forgot all about the Mooreville Home Guards, and never took the trouble to inquire whether they had been conscripted or not. But Captain Roach looked grave, and well he might. He had issued an order to the effect that those he had conscripted must report at his office at least once

in every twenty-four hours to show that they were still on hand and ready to receive marching orders; but on the day the news came that the Yankees had garrisoned the city, only fifteen out of forty-five presented themselves. Two-thirds of their number had left home and friends behind and sought refuge in the city.

“This is a pretty state of affairs,” exclaimed Tom, when Captain Roach told him of it. “Those men are not worthy to be called Southerners. Before I would show myself so cowardly I would go somewhere and hang myself. What will you do with them when they come back?”

“They’ll not come back,” replied the enrolling officer. “They will stay where they are safe, and no doubt desertions will be of daily occurrence as long as the Yankees remain in the city.”

“Wouldn’t it be a good plan for me to go down there and harass them by driving in their pickets now and then?” inquired Tom. He did not know exactly what was meant by driving in an enemy’s pickets, but he had read

in the papers that it was often done by the soldiers in both armies.

“What good would it do?” asked Captain Roach.

“Why, the enemy wouldn’t stay where they were bushwhacked every time they showed themselves, would they? A few determined men could torment them as the buffalo gnats torment our stock.”

“You must be a lunatic or take me for one,” was what Captain Roach said in reply. “Why can’t you be content to let the Yankees alone so long as they are willing to let us alone? If you should fire on their pickets they would send their cavalry all through the country about here, and there’s no telling how much damage they would do.”

“Do you think they have brought cavalry with them?” cried Tom, a most alarming thought suggesting itself to him at the moment.

“Why, of course. They want to know what is going on outside the city, don’t they? And how are they to find out except through their cavalry? You may see blue-coats in Moore-

ville before sundown. You stay at home and mind your business, for I hope to have use for you presently.”

“Do you mean that you hope to send me off with some conscripts?”

“That is what I mean. I shall have to report these desertions, and perhaps it will open the eyes of the State enrolling officer to the fact that he ought to have had that camp of instruction in full blast long ago.”

“But suppose a squad of Yankee cavalry should intercept me on the road?” said Tom in a trembling voice.

“Then you would have to fight, that’s all. If you whipped them it would be a fine thing for you and might lead to promotion. If they whipped you they would release your prisoners and take you and your men away with them.”

“And then they would send me up North, and I might not see home again for long years,” faltered Tom; and everyone in the office saw that he was badly frightened at the prospect.

“Exactly. You took your chances on that

when you accepted your commission, you know. Now, I wish you to go to work on your men and see that they are in some sort of shape when marching orders come. There will be guards at the camp, and I hope your company will not suffer in comparison with them."

Captain Tom saw very clearly that his connection with the Home Guards was not likely to keep him entirely out of reach of the dreaded Yankees; and when he looked through the open door and his gaze rested upon an acquaintance of his who happened to be passing at that moment, another alarming thought forced itself upon him. It was Ned Griffin, and he was mounted on one of Mr. Gray's blooded horses. He smiled pleasantly at Tom, nodded to the Home Guards clustered about the door, and looked on the whole as though he felt well satisfied with himself and with his lot in life. Not only was he comfortably settled as overseer on one of Mr. Gray's fine plantations, but there was no possible chance that he would ever be forced into the army against his will; and that was more than Captain Randolph could say for himself.

“How I should enjoy knocking that beggar out of his saddle,” said the latter under his breath. Then he bent over and whispered some earnest words into the ear of the enrolling officer. “Look here, Roach,” said he, “will you do me the favor to keep the date of marching a secret from everybody except myself.”

“I’d be glad to if you wish it, but I don’t see how I can,” said the captain in surprise. “I shall have to notify the conscripts themselves, won’t I? And if they choose to publish it, as undoubtedly they will in order to give their friends opportunity to come to the office and bid them good-by, how am I going to hinder it? What difference does it make to you, anyway?”

“It may make all the difference in the world,” whispered Tom. “That fellow who just rode by would ask nothing better than to send or take word to the Yankees where they could capture me and a squad of conscripts on a certain day.

“Whew!” whistled the captain. “If he does that I’ll arrest him and ship him off to Richmond.”

“But would that make a free man of me?” demanded Tom impatiently. “And how are you going to prove it on him?”

“That’s so; and when it comes to that I don’t suppose Griffin is the only one about here who would be glad to see you and all the Home Guards packed off to a Northern prison. The only thing you can do is to look out for yourself. Take as big a squad with you as you can muster, and stand ready to fight your way.”

Captain Tom was almost disheartened, but made one more effort to shirk the duty to which, until this particular morning, he had looked forward with the liveliest anticipations of pleasure.

“Can’t you ask the Confederate authorities to send regular troops here to act as guards, and leave me at home to protect the town?” said he desperately. He knew it was a confession of cowardice on his part, but he did not care a snap for that.

“Protect the town!” said Captain Roach in great disgust. “No, I can’t. Yes, on second thought, I can; but it will end in

you and the Home Guards being sent to the front.”

The captain spoke impatiently and jerked a sheet of paper toward him on the desk, intimating by the action that he could not waste any more time with his friend Tom just then, and the latter walked out of the office, mounted his horse, and rode slowly homeward. Something was forever happening to upset his plans, and this last trouble was all the fault of that man Lambert. If he had not fired upon that unarmed boat the Federals would never have thought it necessary to send a force to Baton Rouge, and Captain Tom could have escorted his conscripted neighbors to the camp of instruction without fear of coming in contact with the blue-coated cavalry. He would have had many opportunities to show his fine sword and uniform to soldiers from other parts of the State, and could have talked as big as he pleased about whipping iron-clad gunboats in a fair fight. He had hoped to gain admirers among the officers stationed at the camp, and perhaps he could have himself recommended to fill the commanding officer's

place when the latter was ordered to take the field.

“But that’s all past and gone now,” said Tom as he saw these bright hopes disappearing like the river mists before the rising sun. “If the Yankee cavalry blocks my way, as it surely will if Ned Griffin gets a chance to send them word, I just know I shall be captured, for I can’t expect raw troops like my Home Guards to stand against veterans. I wish Lambert had been hanged before he fired on that boat. Who are these, I wonder? Strangers; and spies, I’ll bet.”

This was another thought that troubled him, and if there had been a branch road that Tom could have turned into he would have taken it rather than meet the two civilians he saw riding toward him. But there was no escape and so he kept on his way; and as he drew nearer to them his eyes began to open wider and an expression of amazement came to his face. He recognized the horses they rode and the clothes they wore, and finally it dawned upon him that the tanned and weather-beaten countenance of one was familiar, though the

boy to whom it belonged had grown wonderfully tall and broad-shouldered since he last saw him—so much so, in fact, that his clothes were too small for him. If there was any doubt in Captain Randolph's mind it vanished when a cheery voice called out :

“Hallo, Tom—ee !”

Tom knew the voice and the odious name by which he had been addressed. It was the one with which his mother used to summon him into the house in the days gone by—with a shrill rising inflection on the last syllable. His first thought was to take no notice of the greeting or to make an angry rejoinder ; but he remembered in time that he had stood in fear of this same boy when he was several pounds lighter than he was now. He looked quite formidable as he sat on his horse, and no doubt during his fifteen months in the army had come in contact with some rough characters, and gained experience and skill in no end of rough and tumble fights ; so Tom thought it wise to be civil.

“Rodney,” he exclaimed, extending his hand with a great show of cordiality. “You

don't know how glad I am to see you back safe and sound. How long have you been at home?"

"Just three days," answered Rodney Gray, for it was he. "And this is my old school-mate, Dick Graham, who lives in Missouri when he lives anywhere. But at present he is just staying wherever night overtakes him."

Dick and Tom shook hands, and the latter continued :

"How do you like soldiering? I suppose you have seen some pretty rough times in the army."

"Oh, yes ; but nothing compared with what some have seen. Dick and I have brought our usual number of legs and arms back with us, but many of our comrades were not so lucky. Doing anything for your country these days?"

Tom's common-sense, if he had any, ought to have told him that it would not do for him to exaggerate his achievements in the presence of Rodney Gray, who knew him of old, and had seen so much more service than he had, but he counted a good deal on Rodney's ignorance and Dick's. They had done all

their campaigning in the interior, had never seen the Mississippi River during their term of service except when they crossed from Arkansas to Tennessee to join the Army of the Centre, and perhaps had not had a chance to read a newspaper for six months, and so he thought he could say what he pleased and they would believe it; but he reckoned without his host.

“I have been very busy since I took command of the Home Guards,” he said, in answer to Rodney’s question. “I don’t suppose I have smelled quite as much powder as you have, but I have been in some pretty hard battles all the same.”

“Why, I hadn’t heard of it,” said Rodney, looking surprised.

“No, I don’t imagine you had opportunity to read the papers very often, but I thought perhaps your father had said something about it in his letters. I have whipped two heavy iron-clad men-of-war——”

“Two which?” exclaimed Dick, while Rodney opened his eyes and looked still more surprised.

Captain Tom repeated the words and was going on to tell about the fights with the gun-boats when Rodney interrupted him with :

“Did those vessels belong to the upper or lower fleet?”

“I don't know,” replied Tom. “But they came up from New Orleans.”

“Then they were not iron-clads; you may rest assured of that.”

“Don't I know an iron-clad when I see it?” cried Tom angrily. “I have it from good authority that the armor on their sides was eleven inches thick, and that there were four feet of solid oak back of that.”

“Great Moses!” ejaculated Dick. “There isn't a vessel in the Yankee navy that could carry such a load as that. Farragut has done all his brilliant fighting with old wooden ships, and there are no iron-clads in his fleet unless they have come to him since he ran past Forts Jackson and St. Philip.”

“That's so,” assented Rodney. “There isn't an iron-clad on the river except those with which the Yankees demolished our fleet in front of Memphis.”

“How does it come that you land soldiers know so much about what is going on here on the river?” demanded Captain Tom, who was very much astonished at the extent of Rodney’s information and Dick’s.

“Oh, we’ve had chances to read the papers now and then,” replied the latter.

“And while we were about it we read both sides,” chimed in Rodney. “Our officers didn’t like to have us do it, because the Yankee papers tell the truth, while our own do not scruple to lie outrageously when things go against us.”

Captain Tom did not know what answer to make, for he had never expected to hear Confederate veterans talk like that. He began to have a suspicion that they were traitors at heart, but he prudently kept his thoughts to himself.

“How long do you remain at home?” he asked at length.

“Just as long as I have a home to shelter me,” answered Rodney. “And when the Yanks come in here and burn it down, as they probably will sooner or later, I shall take to

the woods. I am sick and tired of the service and I don't care who knows it. I tell you, I felt sorry for the poor fellows I saw in Camp Pinckney, for I know what is before them and they don't."

"Were they prisoners?" inquired Tom.

"Well, yes; but they didn't go by that name. They were called conscripts."

"Why, how far is that camp from here?" said Tom, wondering if it was the place to which Captain Roach would forward his conscripts when the orders came.

"About 7000 miles," replied Dick. "At least I thought it was that far before we covered the distance that lies between its stockade and Rodney's home."

"It's about sixty miles, as near as I can judge," said the latter. "Haven't you and what's his name—Roach?—raised men enough to fill up a squad yet? Father says you have been working at it for a good while."

"Captain Roach has mustered some men, but has had no orders to forward them. In fact I don't think he knows that the camp of instruction has been established."

“Who’s going to take them there when they are ready to go?”

“I am,” said Tom proudly; and an instant afterward he felt as though he had signed his own death warrant. There was no chance for him to back out now. He couldn’t be taken suddenly ill or send Lambert in his place—he would have to go with the conscripts himself; for that was what he in his haste said he intended to do, and if he did not keep his promise this old enemy and rival of his would publicly brand him as a coward.

“You are? You are going to take the conscripts to the camp of instruction with your Home Guards?” cried Rodney, his face becoming radiant when he thought of the obstacles in the shape of blue-coated soldiers that Captain Tom might possibly find in his way. “Hey-youp! That will be nuts for the Yanks, won’t it, Dick?”

“You bet. There’s tolerable many Yanks scattered around through the woods, and like as not your friend will have the pleasure of meeting some of them.”

“Do you mean to say that they are scouting

between here and the camp?" exclaimed Tom, who was almost ready to drop when he heard his worst fears confirmed in this positive way.

"We don't mean anything else," answered Rodney. "We ought to know, for we ran into a squad of them on the way home."

"What did they do to you?" inquired Tom, who did not know whether to believe it or not.

"Nothing. They just covered us with their carbines and told us to come in out of the rain, and we came."

"Humph! Why didn't you fight or run?"

"Well, seeing that we had no weapons we couldn't fight; and we know by experience that when a Yank points a gun at you and tells you to move over on his side the line, you had better move."

"But how did you escape?"

"We didn't escape. We showed them our discharges, and when they told us to git, we got. Oh, they were gentleman, high up."

"Top-notch," assented Dick.

"I never yet saw a Yankee who was a gentleman," sneered Tom.

“Look here,” exclaimed Dick, who had heard a good deal about Tom Randolph and learned to dislike him before he ever met him ; “have you much of an acquaintance with live Yanks—I mean with those who wear uniforms?”

Tom was obliged to confess that he had not.

“Well, we’ve seen and talked with a few and may be supposed to know something about them ; and when we say that the squad who captured us, and might have made us trouble but didn’t, were gentlemen, we mean it. If we ever find one of them in a box and see a chance to help him out, we intend to improve it.”

“But as you have no discharge to show, you had better not permit yourself to fall into their hands while you have that uniform on,” said Rodney. “By gracious! It makes my old hat rise to think how I should feel if I knew I was going to be ordered off to that camp with a lot of conscripts. You will lose your prisoners sure, and your Home Guards will be brushed aside like so many cobwebs. If you get through with a whole skin we shall

call you a good one. We'd better be riding along, Dick."

"Now you've done it," said the latter, as he and Rodney moved on and left Tom out of hearing. "You have frightened him out of his wits."

"With your help I think I have given him a good scare," was Rodney's answer. "I'll bet you a month's wages in good and lawful money of the Confederacy that Tom Randolph never takes a squad of conscripts to Camp Pinckney. I know I shouldn't hanker after the job if I were in his place."

As to Tom himself, he was about as badly frightened as he could be without becoming frantic, and much against his will he was obliged to tell himself that there was but one course of action open to him. If it was true that Federal scouting parties had thrown themselves between Mooreville and Camp Pinckney, he must run the fearful risk of being killed or captured by them, or else he must resign his commission, exchange his fine uniform for a citizen's suit and take the position of overseer on his father's plantation.

Tom wanted to yell when this alternative presented itself to him. An overseer was on a par with a blacksmith or a carpenter or a clerk in a store. He had to work for his living and was in consequence a nobody. And Tom remembered how he had railed at Ned Griffin when he accepted Mr. Gray's offer, declaring, in the hearing of everyone who would listen to him, that nobody but a poltroon would take that way of keeping out of the service.

“And now I've got to come to it myself or get shot,” whined Tom. “It will be an awful come-down for a man who has held a commission in the service of the State, but unless mother can see some other way out I shall have to do it.”

Captain Tom wound up by wishing that every man who was in any way responsible for the war might always feel as miserable as he felt at that moment.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOUNDS ON THE TRAIL.

“WHY, Tom, what has happened to make you look so pale and haggard?” anxiously inquired Mrs. Randolph, as the perplexed and discouraged captain of the Home Guards drew rein before the door and rolled out of his saddle instead of dismounting in his usual soldier-like fashion. “Are you ill, or have you heard some terrible news?”

“Both,” replied Tom, giving his horse a slap to start him toward the stable, and afterward throwing himself down upon one of the steps that led up to the porch. “Who do you suppose has come back to town to worry and torment me?”

“I hope it isn’t Rodney Gray,” said his mother, who had not forgotten that the Barrington boy had been elected to office and presented with a sword by Bob Hubbard’s Rangers, while her son was left in the ranks.

Although she never said so out loud, she had indulged in the hope that something might happen to keep Rodney away from Mooreville as long as the war lasted. She knew that he had faced the Yankees in a good many hard battles, and, being a veteran, of course he would crow over Tom, who was nothing but a Home Guard.

“Well, it is Rodney Gray, and nobody else,” said Captain Randolph, in a tone of intense disgust. “He looks as though he had been living on the fat of the land, for the citizen’s clothes he discarded when he went into the army are much too small for him. He has brought with him a comrade who lives in Missouri and who, I judge, is waiting for a chance to get over the river; and he’s about the most impudent chap I ever talked to. He knows more about gunboats than I who have been in battle with them.”

“Have you not learned that those who are the most conceited generally know the least? But you are not obliged to associate with them, and besides you can’t; for you are an officer and they were nothing but privates.”

“I know that, and I did not at all like the familiar way in which they talked to me. They gave me bad news. They were captured by Federal cavalry while they were coming home.”

“Tom!” exclaimed Mrs. Randolph, who was much surprised and alarmed to hear it, “do you mean to say that our enemies are scouting through the country?”

“That’s what I mean ; and if you have any valuables you don’t want to lose, you had better be taking care of them.”

“That is what I think. How did Rodney manage to escape ?”

“He didn’t escape. The Yankees read his discharge and let him go free. And that chum of his, Dick Graham, says they were gentlemen, and if he ever sees one of them in a scrape he will help him out if he can. And they are both tired of the war and don’t mean to go back to the army. The way they talked was shameful, and I will speak to Roach about it the very next time I go to the office.”

Tom then went on to repeat the conversation that had taken place between himself and the

returned veterans, and by the time he got through his mother was as deeply perplexed and as badly frightened as he was. Two things were plain to her: Rodney and Dick were traitors at heart, and ought to be arrested and imprisoned before they had time to talk to any of the conscripts as they had talked to Tom, and the other was that her son could not take a squad of men to the camp of instruction and run the risk of being captured by the Federal troopers.

“Now that I have had time to think of it, I don’t care whether they are shut up or not,” answered Captain Tom. “If they are permitted to run loose in the settlement and to talk to the conscripts as they did to me, they may frighten them into deserting to Baton Rouge; and in that case, don’t you see, there wouldn’t be any men for anybody to guard to the camp of instruction. But if a squad is sent there I am bound to go in command of the escort; I don’t see how I can get out of it, for I told Rodney that I was going.”

“What of that? Why can’t you send Lambert, or let Captain Roach go in your place?”

“If you can think of any excuse I can offer for not going I shall be delighted to hear it,” replied Tom. “But if I back out after what I have said about Ned Griffin’s cowardice and all that, Rodney Gray will never let me hear the last of it. I haven’t said much to you about it, but all the returned soldiers laugh every time my name is mentioned in their hearing, and make sport of the Home Guards because they are willing to acknowledge me as their commander; and I believe that is one thing that makes them so ready to rebel whenever I issue an order they don’t like. Of course Rodney will be the worst of all, for he never liked me.”

“Why, my dear boy, you are in a predicament, that’s a fact,” exclaimed Mrs. Randolph, who had never dreamed that the situation was as bad as this. She knew that Tom would not see a minute’s peace if he gave the common people of Mooreville, especially such low fellows as the returned veterans and those who composed the rank and file of the Home Guards, any reason for believing that he was lacking in courage. “What can

you do? Have you decided upon anything?"

"I have not. That is something you will have to do for me. As far as I can see there are but two courses of action open to me: I must either take the conscripts to camp and take my chances on being shot or captured——"

"O Tom, I'll never consent to that," exclaimed his mother, almost tearfully. "You had much better follow young Griffin's example. Your father and I can arrange all that by sending Larkin into the army and putting you in his place."

Larkin was Mr. Randolph's overseer; and he had not been conscripted by Captain Roach because his employer had claimed exemption for him. Mr. Randolph supposed, and so did his wife, that Tom was provided for as long as the war continued; and as it was necessary that they should have an overseer they decided that Larkin would do as well as anybody else, and Tom's father had entered into a verbal contract to purchase his freedom by providing the hundred pounds of bacon

and beef demanded by the Confederate Government. They would not have done such a thing if they had had the least suspicion that Tom's position as captain of the Home Guards was likely to bring him into contact with the Yankees.

"That is the only alternative," said Tom. "I must face death or confinement in a Northern dungeon, or I must send my resignation to the Governor at the new capital. But I am afraid Larkin will demand a larger bounty than father will be willing to pay."

"Your father will not give him a penny with my consent," said Mrs. Randolph very decidedly. "He is a hireling, and his wishes will not be consulted. He will simply be discharged; that is all there is of it."

"But he is obstinate and hard to deal with, and perhaps he will refuse to go before his year is out," suggested Captain Tom.

"In times like these civil contracts are not worth the paper they are written on," said his mother, in a tone which seemed to imply that she had already determined upon some course of action. "There are some hundred

hands on this plantation, and if your father should find it impossible or inconvenient to pay, within twelve months, the eighty thousand pounds of meat which the Confederate Government will demand as the price of Larkin's exemption, then what? I think myself that Larkin will take to the woods before he will go into the army."

"I don't care where he goes so long as he gets out of my way," declared Captain Tom. "I don't know what our neighbors will think of me when they see me in the field with a gang of niggers, but I can't discover any other way out of the difficulty; can you?"

"At present I cannot; but I would much rather know that you were safe in the field and within sound of the dinner-horn, than to fear that you were in danger of being shot or captured. Perhaps we had best let the subject rest where it is until I have had time to ask your father what he thinks about it. I will tell you our decision to-morrow; and meanwhile don't commit yourself. There goes the bell."

It was the call to dinner and Captain Tom answered it, although he did not have much

appetite for the things he found on the table. His father had of late got out of the way of asking his son if he had heard any news in town, but when the latter remarked that he had met and talked with Rodney Gray that morning, and that Rodney and his companion had been captured by the enemy while on the way home, Mr. Randolph took interest enough in the matter to inquire into the particulars, and to ask Tom if he didn't think he would run some risk in taking conscripts to camp.

“Risk !” repeated Captain Tom. “You may well say that. Roach thinks I will have to fight my way, and so does Rodney. He said in so many words that I would be sure to lose my prisoners, that the Home Guards would be brushed out of the way like cob-webs, and if I got through with a whole skin he would call me a good one. Risk ! I should think so. It's positively dangerous !”

“Well, if you don't want to go, there is one way you can get out of it,” replied Mr. Randolph, as he folded his napkin and pushed his

chair back from the table. "You can throw up your commission."

"I have thought of resigning," said Tom; and he had half a mind to broach the subject of Larkin's discharge then and there, but finally concluded that he would leave it to his mother.

"As far as I am concerned, I shall be glad to see you a civilian once more, and to know that I shall never put eyes on that sword and uniform again," continued Mr. Randolph. "The Southern people are all fools, and a year ago I was one of the most senseless of them."

"Does that mean that you have given up the hope of Southern independence?" inquired Tom, who was not greatly surprised, although he had never heard his father talk in this way before.

"It means that we have made beggars of ourselves by trying to break up the government when we had no earthly excuse for it. We were never short of anything before, and now I am put to my stumps to find paper to write on and salt for my table. There will be

no bacon and hams for us next winter unless I can induce some of my friends to do a little trading in Baton Rouge for me. I dare not go into the city to do it for myself, for you are captain of the Home Guards. I wish in my soul that I had had a guardian appointed over me about the time I was making such an idiot of myself on account of that company."

Mr. Randolph rubbed some "nigger twist" between his palms, jammed it rather spitefully into an earthen pipe with a cane stem, and went out on the gallery to enjoy his after-dinner smoke. He was a rich planter, and it was not so very long ago that his crop of cotton was worth a fortune to him every year; but he could not smoke cigars now unless they were given to him. Some of his neighbors who had not taken so deep an interest in the Home Guards, Rodney Gray's father for one, had passes that took them in and out of Baton Rouge as often as they chose to make use of them; and these men had salt and tea and coffee, stockings and shoes and cigars in abundance, and "plenty of greenback money, too," as one darkey affirmed, who chanced to

catch a momentary glimpse of the inside of Mr. Gray's pocket-book.

Mr. Randolph made his exit from the room through one of the low windows that opened upon the veranda, sat down long enough to take a dozen or more pulls at his pipe, and then came back to say :

“Tom, you want to be kinder careful what you tell about Rodney Gray and his folks, for, if we work matters right, I am sure Gray will lend me a helping hand now and then ; and goodness knows I need it bad enough. I suspicion that in some way or other he has got on the blind side of the Yankees in Baton Rouge.”

“Then he ought to be reported to our authorities,” said Mrs. Randolph spitefully.

“That's what I say !” exclaimed Captain Tom. “If he is giving aid and comfort to the enemy he is breaking our laws ; and I say——”

“Hold your horses,” interrupted his father. “What is the use of cutting off your nose to spite your face? Instead of giving aid and comfort to the Federals, he is working them

so that they are giving much aid and comfort to him and a few others who are in the ring with him."

"And is it your desire to become one of that 'ring,' as you call it?" demanded his wife, pitching her voice in a little higher key than usual. "Would you colloque with the enemies of your country for the sake of making something out of them? Mr. Randolph—George—I am surprised to hear you hint at such baseness; and in the presence of a prominent State officer, too."

"Hold your horses," said Mr. Randolph again. "If I can make something to eat and wear by trading with the Yankees, who seem to have enough and to spare, it is to my interest and yours to do it, is it not? And through it all I can still be a good Confederate, can't I? Look here," he continued, walking up to the table and sinking his voice almost to a whisper. "I have 200 bales of cotton concealed in the swamp, and Gray has more than twice as much. And every bale of that cotton is worth sixty cents a pound in New York."

Mr. Randolph straightened up and looked at his wife and son as much as to say, "What do you think of that?" He expected them to be surprised, and certainly he was not disappointed. For a minute or two they were so amazed that they could not speak.

"Six—did I understand you to say *sixty* cents a pound?" Captain Tom managed to ask at last.

"Where did you hear that ridiculous story?" chimed in Mrs. Randolph. "I have read the papers very closely, and I didn't see anything of it."

"Do you for a moment imagine that our lying papers——"

"Mr. Randolph—George!"

"Hold your horses. I know what I am talking about. It is a fact that our papers conceal everything that goes against us, or make light of it, and of course they wouldn't say that cotton is bringing sixty cents in the North while in the Confederacy it is worth only seven. If our papers should publish such reports as that, don't you see that the Confederacy wouldn't get any more cotton? Every

planter who owns a bale would make haste to run it into the swamp.”

“If I had any cotton I would rather give it to our government for three cents than to our enemies for twenty times as much,” declared Captain Tom, who, seeing that he did not possess a pound of the commodity in question, could afford to be very patriotic. He looked at his mother, expecting to hear her say that she would do the same; but she gazed down at her plate and said nothing. Sixty cents a pound! Reckoning each bale at 450 pounds that would make her husband’s concealed cotton worth about \$54,000, *if* it could only be placed in the hands of the Yankees without being confiscated. But there was the rub.

“Tom, you always were about half-witted,” exclaimed his father, who was so angry that he spoke without thinking. “I would rather have sixty cents in greenback money than four dollars in Confederate scrip any day; and I don’t see the use of your talking in that senseless way.”

“But your cotton is in the swamp, and how

are you going to get it to New York ?” asked Mrs. Randolph.

“And how do you know that you and the darkeys who helped you put it there are the only ones who know where it is ?” chimed in Tom. “The Lincoln hirelings have been stealing cotton all the way from Cairo to Vicksburg, and what assurance have you that some enemy of ours will not guide a gang of blue-coats from Baton Rouge to the place where it is hidden ?”

“I have no assurance whatever, and that is one thing that robs me of sleep at night,” replied Mr. Randolph ; and the nervous way in which he puffed at his pipe and strode about the room showed that the thought made him uneasy every time it came into his mind. “Of course I stand a chance of losing it ; but if I can keep it a few months longer I know it will be worth a big sum of money to us—and good money, too. One of our neighbors, who shall be nameless, showed me a couple of Northern papers he brought from Baton Rouge last night, and both of them contained a notice of that sale of cotton in New York. There were

seventy bales of it, and it was confiscated at Port Royal. Some of the ranking officers in the city also told him that there was some talk of opening a trade in cotton at all points occupied by Federal troops, and that influential parties were applying by the hundred for permits. He could have told me more if he had felt like it, but Tom, your miserable Home Guards, whom I wish I had never heard of, made him shut his mouth. I am afraid I ruined myself utterly by helping you organize that company.”

Too nervous and excited to say more, Mr. Randolph stepped through the window to the porch, and Tom left the table and went slowly upstairs. He could not have told what prompted him to do it, but when he reached his room he took off his fine uniform and arrayed himself in a suit of citizen's clothes. He stood his elegant sword up in the corner of his closet, and when it slipped down so that he could not close the door, he kicked it out of the way as he would have done with any other worthless piece of furniture. For some reason he seemed to have conceived a sudden

and violent dislike to everything that reminded him of the service in which, one short year ago, his whole soul been wrapped up; and when he mounted his horse, which a darkey had brought to the door, and the animal began to prance and go sideways, as he had been taught to do, Captain Tom was so angry that he lashed him unmercifully with his whip, and would have kept him in a dead run all the way to the enrolling office, had it not been for an unexpected and somewhat startling interruption.

Although there were many extensive and well-cultivated plantations around Mooreville, there were some unbroken patches of timber which stretched away into the Pearl River country and beyond. This timberland was mostly low and intersected by innumerable little streams, which, when the Pearl was "booming" at certain seasons of the year, overflowed their banks and turned all the productive bottom into an immense swamp. It was here that Tom Randolph's hog-stealing lieutenant plied his vocation, though he might have had venison instead of pork, if he had not

been too lazy to hunt for it; for the bottom was a famous place for game of all kinds. There were runaway negroes there too, by the score, and their numbers had increased wonderfully since the war broke out.

It was while Tom was galloping furiously past one of these patches of timber, which was separated from the road by a narrow field of corn, that his attention was attracted by the loud baying of a pack of hounds; but his mind was so fully occupied with the punishment he was inflicting upon his unoffending horse that he did not give much heed to it, until he caught sight of a couple of men riding swiftly through the corn a little in advance of him. When they reached the fence that ran between the field and the road one of them threw off the top rails so that they could jump their horses over it, while the other raised his hand as a signal for Tom to stop. Then he saw that the men were strangers to him, that they wore gray uniforms, were armed with carbines and sabres instead of squirrel rifles and shot guns, and wore plumes in their slouch hats instead of rooster feathers. They were

veterans beyond a doubt ; but where did they come from, and what were they doing in that country, which was supposed to be guarded by an efficient company of Home Guards? Their presence angered Captain Tom, and he wished he had the authority to order them back where they belonged without asking any questions ; but they greeted him very civilly.

“ Good-afternoon,” said the foremost, as he leaped his horse over the ditch and came into the road where Tom was waiting for him ; then he made a military salute which was promptly and gracefully returned. “ Ah ! I thought you were one of us from the start,” continued the veteran. “ What regiment ? ”

“ I do not belong to any regiment,” admitted Tom. “ I am commander of a partisan company and hold a commission from the Governor.”

“ Seen any service ? ” was the soldier’s next question.

“ More than I want to see again,” replied Tom, who had not yet been cured of his propensity to boast as often as the chance was presented. “ The enemy’s gunboats have

kept me pretty busy since they came up from New Orleans.”

“Well, if you’ve got courage enough to fight gunboats, you’ve got more than I have,” said the veteran honestly. “How high up are you?”

“I am a captain.”

“I beg your pardon, sah, I have been a little too fast. I am only a second lieutenant, and my comrade is a first duty sergeant,” and then the lieutenant and his sergeant both raised their caps. They had evidently served under some officer who exacted all the honors due him.

Of course they took the right course to gain Tom’s good will and bring them an invitation to supper, but they did not do it intentionally. Having served at the front ever since they enlisted, and until they were transferred to the invalid corps on account of wounds received in battle they had never seen any Home Guards, and did not know the estimation in which that useless organization was held by the people who knew the most about them. They had heard of the exploits of

John S. Mosby, who commanded a body of men that were farmers during the daytime and robbers and cut-throats at night, and who had kept certain portions of Virginia in a turmoil even before he was thought to be worthy of a commission in the Confederate army, and they supposed that every company of partisans was just like his. Consequently they were ready to treat Tom Randolph with the greatest respect.

The latter drew himself up very stiffly, assumed a soldier's position in the saddle, copying Rodney Gray as nearly as he could, and said with the dignity befitting his rank :

“I assure you that no apologies are necessary. I am always glad to shake a loyal Confederate by the hand.” And he proved it by extending to each of the veterans a palm that was as limp as a piece of wet rope. “Now, may I ask where you belong, and what business brought you to this part of the country?”

“Certainly, sah. We used to belong to Jackson's brigade and division, but were invalided on account of injuries received in action, and are now serving as guards at a con-

script camp, dog-gone the luck. We are on the trail of four escaped Yankees who are making tracks for Baton Rouge. Didn't you hear our dogs giving tongue just now?"

"I noticed it, but supposed the hounds were running something on their own hook. I noticed, too, that they yelped as though they were baffled."

"And so they are. We have followed the trail for forty miles through swamp and briers and cane, and now we have lost it completely. We ought to have captured and hung the villains long ago, but everywhere along their line of flight they have been assisted by the negroes. We found abundant proof of it."

"Well, that bangs me!" exclaimed Tom, who, like many others of his class, labored under the delusion that the slaves did not know who their friends were. "Why did you not shoot the negroes?"

"For the very good reason, sah, that we could not place the blame upon any particular ones. We found where the Yanks had been fed, and once came so close upon them that we captured some quilts which the darkeys

had loaned them for beds; but among the hundred and fifty negroes on that plantation we could not find the one who owned the quilts. Do you know of any Union men or blacks around here who would be likely to give them food and shelter, or aid them in reaching Baton Rouge?"

If that question had been asked him the day before Captain Randolph could have mentioned the names of a dozen white men who were mean and disloyal enough to give food and shelter to anybody who wore a blue uniform, but now he could not think of a single one. Among others he would have given the names of some returned soldiers who had spread dissatisfaction in the ranks of his company by deriding Tom's ability as a commander and laughing at the story of his battles with the iron-clads, and he would have asked the lieutenant what he thought of fellows like Rodney Gray and Dick Graham who did not hesitate to declare that they were sick of the army, and did not intend to go back if they could help it. He would have told, too, of the trading that was con-

tinually going on between the Yankee invaders and so-called Confederates who lived in Baton Rouge and Mooreville ; but somehow he did not speak of any of these things. The knowledge that Mooreville might at any moment be occupied by Federal cavalry frightened him ; and the plain words his father spoke at the dinner table opened his eyes to the fact that silence was sometimes good policy. So he made answer :

“There are several people about here who are suspected of being Union, but I can't say whether they are or not. I drove some out of the settlement months ago, and they have never returned.”

“That was perfectly right, sah,” said the lieutenant, “but I should think you would be afraid to stay here. What will you do when the Yanks come swarming into town, and some mean sneak tells them that you have been persecuting Union men? You will have to take to the brush.”

“But do you think the enemy is in sufficient force to ride over us like that?” inquired Tom anxiously. He had often asked himself this

very question, and tried to find comfort in the hope that the Yankees would never find their way to Mooreville.

“Oh, it doesn't require much force to take full possession of a little town like this,” replied the veteran. “I could do it with a dozen men. We have seen 200 of their cavalry since we have been on this hunt.”

“You have seen them!” ejaculated Tom.

“Yes. We ran into some of them and had to skirmish our way out. We have seen a squad on every road except this, and how those four escaped prisoners we are after missed seeing them beats me.”

“Do you mean to tell me that there are 200 Yankees between here and Camp Pinckney?” exclaimed Tom, who did not like to hear Rodney's story and Dick's confirmed in this positive way. “I should think you would have turned back when you found your way blocked.”

“Since you are an old soldier, sah, and have snuffed Yankee powder, I know that you are joking. Our way wasn't blocked, and we had no orders to turn back. We were commanded

to capture those four men and bring them to Camp Pinckney without the loss of an hour ; and so we kept right on as though there hadn't been a Yank within 1000 miles of us."

Captain Randolph gazed admiringly at the veteran, who did not talk or act as though he had done more than any other soldier would have done under the circumstances.

CHAPTER IX.

UNCLE SAM'S LOST BOYS.

“I WISH I had some of your courage,” said Tom at length. “I may need it, for I am liable any day to be ordered to Camp Pinckney with a squad of conscripts.”

“W-h-e-w!” whistled the lieutenant. He looked at the sergeant, the sergeant looked at him, and then they both looked at Captain Tom with an expression on their faces that the latter could not understand. “Well, if this is the sort of work you partisans have to do, I am glad I am not a partisan,” continued the lieutenant. “I’d rather go through Bull Run and take my chances, than attempt to travel the sixty miles between here and camp with a squad of conscripts. You will have to take to the woods, of course, and that will be the time your conscripts will give you the slip. If you start with a hundred and get through with ten you will be doing well.”

“There are people here who think I'll not get through at all,” said Tom. “They say that I and my men will be captured or killed.”

“*Of* course,” answered the lieutenant, who had never once thought of that contingency. “It's to be expected that you will take your chances on that. It is what we all have to do when we meet the enemy.”

“Have you found them a tolerably brave lot?” inquired Captain Tom, who wanted much to meet some veteran who would assure him that the Yankees were all cowards and did not know how to fight.

“As brave as they make 'em,” said the lieutenant earnestly, “and dead shots into the bargain. We have bitten off a good deal more than we can chew in ten years ; now you remember what I tell you. Of course, captain, I wouldn't say that in the presence of a civilian ; but one old soldier knows how to take another. Now, don't you think, sah, that you partisans could lend us a hand in capturing these Yankees.”

“Why, certainly ; and I will warn my com-

pany out at once," replied Tom readily. "Where will I find you at the end of a couple of hours? I want you and the sergeant to take supper and lodgings at my mother's house to-night."

"Much obliged to you, sah, but we couldn't think of it," said the lieutenant. "Colonel Parker—he's the regular who commands the camp—would take us to task for wasting time if he should hear of it, and besides, we don't want to run the risk of being gobbled."

"Gobbled?" repeated Captain Tom; for that was a word that had not yet reached his part of the Confederacy.

"Captured, you know."

"Who's going to capture you at our house?" exclaimed Tom, who could feel himself turning white.

"The Yankee scouts might, if they should happen to ride into town and any enemy of yours could tell them where to find us; and these escaped prisoners might do it."

Captain Randolph was utterly confounded. His idea of an escaped prisoner was a man

running frantically for his life and too badly frightened to look behind him ; but the lieutenant's words made it plain to him that the four who were foot-loose somewhere in the vicinity of Mooreville were not that sort. He became really alarmed when the soldier went on to explain the situation.

“ You see they were run down and gobbled up three days ago by a large squad of our cavalry, who started them for camp under guard of four good men, one for each prisoner,” said he. “ But before they had been away from us half an hour, what do those Yankees do but rise up and kill their guards, take their weapons and ammunition, hitch their horses in the woods so that they could not go on and alarm the camp, and dig out through the swamp for the Mississippi River.”

“ And those armed and desperate prisoners are supposed to be somewhere in the settlement at this moment ?” said Tom with a shudder.

“ That is what we think, for the dogs tracked them within a mile of this corn-field.”

“ I hope you will hang them the minute you

get your hands on them," said Tom, in a trembling voice.

"There are fourteen men in my squad and that is what they allow to do," replied the lieutenant; "but then they won't, for that would bring them into trouble with Colonel Parker. If a captured man sees a chance to escape he is at liberty to improve it, and to hurt anything or anybody that gets in his way; and in doing it he runs the risk of getting hurt himself."

"The first we heard of it," said the sergeant, speaking for the first time, "was when six of our men came into camp on foot, and reported that they had been disarmed and dismounted by four Yankees who had paroled and turned them loose."

"That was about as impudent a thing as I ever heard of, and it shows what a daring lot those escaped Yanks are," said the lieutenant; and instead of getting angry when he thought of it, he surprised Tom by laughing heartily, as though he looked upon it as the best kind of a joke. "A private has no right to parole anybody, but all the same those Yanks wrote

out the papers in due form, and told our boys that they could either sign them or stay there in the swamp till a party came out from camp to bury them. And our boys thought they had better sign."

"I didn't suppose that escaped prisoners ever acted that way," said Captain Tom, after a few minutes of surprised silence.

"Won't they have something to talk about when they get among their friends?" said the lieutenant, with another laugh. "They are brave soldiers, and I'll bet you they are good fellows; and when the war is over, I don't care which side whips, I would like to meet them and talk over the events of the last few days. We'd have a good laugh over them."

"I don't think it is any laughing matter to kill four men as those Yanks killed their guards," replied Tom, who could not understand how men fighting under opposing flags could have the least particle of respect or kindly feeling for one another.

"Oh, that's war, you know," said the lieutenant lightly. "But you will see now why

the sergeant and I must decline your kind invitation to take supper and sleep at your house. We don't want to put ourselves in a position to be surrounded and captured, for we are pretty close to Baton Rouge, and those Yanks might decide to take us along instead of parolling us. If we camp in the woods with our dogs around us we'll know that we are safe. Now, we shall have to bid you good-by, captain. You will get your company together and do what you can to help us?"

"Look out that they don't get the first shot at you, sah," suggested the sergeant.

"And if you are lucky enough to catch them may I depend on you to send them to camp under guard?" added the lieutenant.

"It might be to your interest to make the acquaintance of our colonel."

Captain Randolph shook hands with the two veterans and promised to do all a loyal soldier could do to head the fugitives off from Baton Rouge and send them back to Camp Pinckney; but there was not so much heart in his promise as there was in the one he made

before he learned that the Yankees were armed and daring. In order to keep up appearances, however, he put his horse into a lope as soon as the hand-shaking was over, and made the best of his way to the enrolling office. He found a few Home Guards loafing there, but not half as many as he would have found two days before. These valiant men had heard that they might be ordered off with a squad of conscripts any time, and they did not care to go while the Union cavalry were riding about through the country. So the most of them stayed at home, holding themselves in readiness to take to their heels if they saw a horseman approaching, and had any reason to believe that he had been sent by Captain Roach to warn them to report for duty. The captain was at his desk, and for some reason or other seemed to be in the best of spirits.

“You ought to have dropped in about half an hour ago,” said he, as Tom walked into the office after hitching his horse at the rack in front of the door. “I have had a very pleasant visit from one of your old

friends, who has just returned from Bragg's army."

Captain Randolph was so surprised that he forgot all about the daring Yankees who were running wild in the woods in close proximity to Mooreville. He left home for the express purpose of warning the enrolling officer against Rodney Gray and his chum Dick Graham, but something in the captain's manner told him that his efforts in that direction would not meet with much success; for the returned soldiers had had the first chance at the captain, and they were both smooth-tongued, winning fellows.

"If you are speaking of Rodney Gray——" began Tom, in angry tones.

"So you have seen him, have you!" exclaimed the enrolling officer, leaning back in his chair and breaking out into a peal of laughter. "Well, he's a good one, isn't he?"

"If you are speaking of him," sputtered Tom, "you know as well as I do that he is no friend of mine. I have told you so more times than I can remember."

"I know you have, and I confess that I

treated him and his chum rather coldly when they came into the office and said they wanted to set themselves square with me by showing that they were honorably discharged Confederate soldiers," answered the captain. "But they did not seem to care a snap for me or for my opinion of them."

"That's just like Rodney's impudence," exclaimed Tom.

"Well, you see he has a sort of good-natured contempt for me because I am not a veteran. He knows more in five minutes than I do in a month, and he is not ignorant of the fact. He and his chum sat down without waiting to be asked, talked as though they had known me always, and I laughed till I cried over the stories they told of army life. I hope to hear more of those stories when I go up to Gray's to dinner on Thursday."

If the enrolling officer had aimed a blow at him with the ebony ruler that lay on his desk Tom Randolph would not have been more dumfounded. He leaned heavily upon the back of a chair for a moment or two, and then dropped almost helplessly into it.

“To Gray’s—to dinner on Thursday!” he repeated faintly. “You can’t—you mustn’t go there.”

“What’s the reason I mustn’t?” demanded Captain Roach, surprised in his turn. “Good dinners are not so plenty these times that I can afford to throw them over my shoulder.”

“It isn’t that,” replied Tom. “It’s the sentiments of the people who invited you that I object to. When you go into old man Gray’s house you will go plump into a nest of traitors.”

“No, I reckon not. A man who volunteers and does a soldier’s duty for fifteen long months, and who shows me an honorable discharge, can’t well be called a traitor.”

“He stayed in the army after he got there because he had to, and did a soldier’s duty for the very good reason that he couldn’t help himself,” said Captain Tom spitefully. “But see how he talks since he came back! He says he will not go into the army again, and declares that the Yanks who captured him while he was on the way home were gentlemen.”

“Well, what would you think if you had been in his place? What was there to hinder those Yanks from taking him and Graham to Baton Rouge and turning them over to the provost marshal? They were in uniform when they were captured.”

“I see you are on the side of those traitors,” said Tom, rising to his feet and pounding lightly upon the captain’s desk with his clenched hand, “and I have this much to say to you: If you go to Gray’s you will no longer be welcome at our house.”

“I shall be sorry for that, of course, but I don’t suppose I can help it. Gray and his chum know all about soldiering, and as I may have to go into the army myself some day, I want to learn all I can from them. I think you would be wise to do the same.”

“And while you have been having a good time with my enemies, I have been working for the cause which you made oath to support but seem to have deserted,” continued Tom impressively. “I have been making arrangements to capture some of the very men whom Rodney Gray and Dick Graham promised to

assist if they found them in trouble. I want all you fellows," here he turned about and addressed himself to the Home Guards who had come into the office to hear what passed between their captain and the enrolling officer, "to mount your horses at once and go in pursuit of four escaped prisoners who are hiding in the woods somewhere on the outskirts of the town. As you go, warn every other member of the company you see to turn out and join in the chase."

"Why, captain, what do you mean?" cried the enrolling officer, becoming excited at once.

Without paying the least attention to him or his question, Captain Tom proceeded to give his men a short and very incomplete account of the interview he had held with the two veterans while he was on his way to town. We say the account was incomplete because Tom did not tell his men that the fugitives had armed themselves when they escaped from their guards, and had been carrying things with a high hand ever since. He was afraid he could not raise much of a squad to aid in the pursuit if he told that; so all he

said was that the four Yankees were striking for Baton Rouge, that fourteen Confederate veterans had been following them with hounds for three days past, and that if they (the Home Guards) would turn out in a body and capture the prisoners from under the noses of the Confederates, it might be a feather in their hats. The Home Guards thought so too; and hardly waiting for Tom to get through with what he had to tell them, they made a rush through the door toward the rack at which their horses were hitched.

“I am glad to see you so prompt to obey orders,” shouted Captain Tom, following them to the sidewalk and waving his hand to them as they rode off one after the other. “We’ll show the authorities that there are some loyal people around here yet. I’ll be with you as soon as I can ride home and get my uniform and weapons, but you needn’t wait. Divide yourselves into squads of six or eight, and search every nook and corner of the woods you can get into between this time and dark. And don’t forget cornercribs and nigger cabins, nor the cellars and lofts of Union men.”

“I think it strange that you did not bring those Confederate officers straight to my office,” said the conscript captain, when the last Home Guard had ridden away out of sight.

“Since you have deserted loyal people for the society of those who say that they will not do anything more for the cause they pretend to believe in, I am sorry myself that I did not bring them here,” answered Tom. “But I did not once think of it. I am glad they did not accept my invitation to supper, for I should have felt obliged to ask you to join them. Where are you going?” he added, when Captain Roach began bundling his papers into his desk and locking the drawers.

“I am going to help capture those four Yankees,” said he. “They are Confederate prisoners, and I am a Confederate officer.”

Tom did not wait to see him off, but mounted his horse and set out for home at top speed, as if he were impatient to arm himself and join his men in the pursuit; but he went long distances out of his way to summon members of his company whom he knew he would not

find at home, so that it was after three o'clock when he galloped through his father's gate and drew rein at the foot of the steps. He had had ample time to think over the situation and make up his mind what he would do.

"My dear boy," exclaimed Mrs. Randolph, when Tom had hurriedly explained matters to her, "you must not risk your life and liberty by going in pursuit of those escaped prisoners. I'll never consent to it; never in this world."

"Then show me, please, how I can get out of it," answered Captain Tom, gently disengaging himself from his mother's clinging hands and starting up the stairs toward his room. "Some of my men are in the woods by this time, and if that lieutenant should happen to run against them, his first question would be: 'Where's your captain? He ought to be here, conducting the pursuit in person.' Really I must show up, mother, for I want those veterans to tell Colonel Parker, when they go back to camp, that I did all I could to aid them in capturing the Yanks."

"Then you are sure they will be captured—

that they will not be permitted to roam at liberty during the night?" said Mrs. Randolph, who had never before exhibited so much nervousness and anxiety as she did at that moment. "I couldn't sleep if I knew they were at large."

"No, I am not sure of it, for they have proved themselves to be both daring and cunning. Just think what they have done! They have killed their guards, captured and paroled half a dozen soldiers, and kept out of reach of the hounds for three days; and such men are not going to be taken easily, I bet you," replied Tom from the head of the stairs; and then he went into his room to don his uniform and buckle on his sword and revolver. A few minutes later he came out to ask his mother what she thought of Captain Roach's way of doing business.

"I wonder if he couldn't be reported and hauled over the coals for associating with those Grays?" said Tom.

"If the captain is disloyal—and we have no way of judging of his feelings except by his actions—I certainly think his superior officers

ought to know it," said Mrs. Randolph. "But, my dear——"

"I know what you want to say," interrupted Captain Tom. "You mean that if I report him for any of his shortcomings, he will conscript me. Then he had better do it at once, for if he waits a week it will be too late."

"Tom, are you going to resign your commission?"

"I am going to take Larkin's place as overseer of this plantation," replied Tom, very decidedly. "I thought it would be a big come-down at first, but since I have thought the matter over, I have made up my mind that it will be a change for the better. I can't be forced into the army; being a civilian I may be able to obtain some salt, coffee, and things from the Yanks; and if father ever has a chance to sell that cotton, I shall be at hand to help him run it up out of the swamp."

Captain Tom fully expected that his mother would strongly object to these plans, and he even thought she might denounce him as a traitor to the South and its flag; but some-

what to his surprise she did nothing of the kind. She, too, had had leisure to think the matter over, and much against her will had been obliged to confess to herself that it didn't pay to be too good a rebel while the Federals held undisputed possession of Baton Rouge, and blue-coated cavalry were scouting about through the country. She even wished that Tom would hide his uniform, his military saddle and bridle, and his sword where nobody would ever see them again.

“That is what I have decided to do,” continued Captain Tom, as he slipped his six-shooter into its holster and came down the stairs, “and I mean to attend to it as soon as I see those four Yanks captured.”

“Perhaps it would be as well,” answered his mother. “Delays are sometimes dangerous. But I don't see how I can give my consent to let you go on this expedition.”

“Don't worry about me. I am bound to come back all right, and I'll never have to go on another. And when that traitor Roach gets ready to send off his conscripts, he can tell somebody besides me to take them.”

“Will you recommend anyone to the Governor to take your place?”

“Not much. I don't care whether or not anybody gets it, so long as Lambert is left out in the cold with a fair chance of being sent to Camp Pinckney. Good-by, mother. I must be off, or some evil-minded person in the settlement will accuse me of shirking my duty.”

The leave-taking was a tearful one on Mrs. Randolph's part, but Captain Tom could not have been more unconcerned if he had been going to Mooreville to buy groceries. He thought he knew a way to keep up his reputation as a loyal Southerner and steer clear of the dreaded Yankees at the same time.

“There's one thing about it,” soliloquized Tom, as he galloped out of the gate, waving a last farewell to his mother as he went, “our folks are not as fierce for secession as they used to be, and I am mighty glad to know it. We're getting so we live awful hard. Our table is a sight to behold, with nothing on it but corn pone, bacon, sweet potato coffee, and buttermilk from one week's end to another's, and I am getting tired of such grub. And

where am I going to raise forty-five dollars in Confederate money to pay for a pair of boots when these wear out? There's plenty of gold in the house, and I could use it to good advantage if I could only get into Baton Rouge and obtain a permit from the provost marshal to trade there. I'll bet you that Rodney Gray and that chum of his will be rigged out spick-and-span from head to foot the next time I see them, and they will buy their things inside the Yankee lines, too. Now, I'll tell you what's a fact; I've just as much right to use the Yankees as they have."

When Captain Tom reached this point in his meditations he drew rein in front of a pair of bars giving entrance into a lane that ran through his father's plantation in the direction of the river. The house was concealed from his view by an abrupt bend in the road, and a hasty glance on each side showed him that there was no one in sight; so he bent down from his saddle, opened the bars, and rode into the lane. It is true that the escaped prisoners and the soldiers and hounds that were pursuing them were not on that side of

the road, but two miles away in the opposite direction, but Captain Tom did not stop to think of that. He knew where he was going, and made all haste to get there as soon as he had put up the bars.

“There are not half a dozen citizens in the neighborhood who will lend a hand in catching those prisoners, and the last one of the Home Guards will fall out and strike for a place of safety the minute they find out that the Yanks are armed,” thought Tom, as he rode swiftly along the lane, turning about in his saddle now and then to make sure that no one was observing his movements. “And that being the case, why should I risk my life in trying to capture them? Say! By gracious!”

As this exclamation fell from Captain Tom's lips he pulled up his horse with a jerk, and looked first at the road and then at the cluster of trees that shut the house off from his sight. He spent a minute or two in this way and then rode on again.

“That's a splendid idea, but my wit always comes too late to be of any use to me,” said he

angrily ; and he avenged himself on his slow wit by hitting his spirited horse such a stinging cut with his whip that the animal came very near "flying" the road and going off into the ditch. "Instead of this gray uniform, which will send me to a Northern prison if the Yankees ever catch me with it on, why didn't I keep on my citizen's clothes? Then I needn't have had the least fear of meeting the prisoners. I could have fed and sheltered them to-night and guided them to the city in the morning ; and in return for my services I could have asked the provost marshal to give me a permit to buy some things in the stores. Dog-gone the luck !"

Captain Randolph hit his horse another merciless blow with the whip, and this time the animal's sudden spring had a most astounding result. He jumped sideways clear over the ditch that ran by the side of the road, and when he landed on the opposite bank he stopped so quickly that his rider was thrown headlong from his saddle, bringing up among the cotton stalks ten feet farther on. He was not in the least injured or even jarred

by his fall, but he was tolerably angry to find himself so easily unhorsed. He raised himself on his elbow, but before he could make another move, or give utterance to his pent-up feelings, a voice near at hand said pleasantly :

“Glad to see you, John, but didn't expect to be introduced in such a promiscuous manner, you know. Don't stand on ceremony, but come right in. The latch-string is always out.”

This incident happened almost in the edge of the little grove of evergreens toward which Captain Tom had been directing his course ever since he passed through the bars. It was his intention to conceal himself and his horse among the evergreens and remain there in safety until dark, while the rest of the Home Guards and the citizens, if any there were who had a fancy to join Captain Roach in such perilous business, searched the woods for the escaped prisoners.

Tom Randolph's first feeling was one of the most intense surprise, without a particle of fear or anxiety in it ; but when he rolled over on his side to bring his face toward the

grove, he was almost paralyzed with terror to see three ragged fellows in nondescript uniforms advancing swiftly upon him, while a fourth covered his head with a cocked carbine from the edge of the evergreens. One of the three secured his horse, which had not moved an inch since he rid himself of his inhuman rider, a second swung the black muzzle of a musket in unpleasant proximity to his face, and the third knelt by his side and took possession of his sword and revolver.

“Was yer looking fur we uns, Johnny boy?” chuckled the one who held the musket. “If yer was, hyar we-is. Mighty glad to see yer, and dat’s a fac’. Come along now, and we uns will cut a watermillyun.”

“Who—who are you?” gasped Tom, whose terror was greatly increased by the soldier’s grim humor.

“Well, Johnny, we’re so ragged and dirty just now that we don’t rightly know who we are, except that we are some of Uncle Sam’s lost boys,” replied the one who had captured the sword and revolver. “I expect he’s down to Baton Rouge now waiting for us, and so



TOM RANDOLPH CAPTURED BY THE ESCAPED PRISONERS.

we'd best be toddling along. Take that horse into the grove out of sight, Ben. Come on, Johnny."

"Have you heard hounds giving tongue in the woods anywhere about here?" inquired the one who had first spoken.

Tom was so nearly overcome with fear that he could not answer. He hardly knew when two of Uncle Sam's lost boys took him by the arms and raised him to his feet. All he realized was that he had run squarely into the hands of those he had tried so hard to avoid.

CHAPTER X.

NED GRIFFIN BRINGS NEWS.

AFTER accompanying our Confederate hero, Rodney Gray, through fifteen months of army life, during which he saw more adventures, endured more hardships and learned more wisdom than he had ever dreamed of, we left him, at the close of the second volume of this series, safe in the home of his boyhood, which he had left for the avowed purpose of "driving the Yankees out of Missouri." He confidently assured his mother and the servants who assembled to see him off that it would not take more than three or four months to do that, and then he would return, like Lentulus of old, "with victorious eagles." Instead of that, he came back as ragged and disgusted a specimen of a Confederate volunteer as could be found anywhere in the South at the time of which we write, and that is saying a good deal. The summer clothing given

him and his comrades at Tupelo after the retreat from Corinth, and which had been furnished by one of the numerous "ladies' associations" of the South, was not calculated to stand soldier treatment. The trousers Rodney wore were made of a rich shawl, and his blouse had once been part of a costly silk dress. His nights at the camp-fire, and the days he had passed trudging along dusty roads, had played sad havoc with his "pictured uniform." That was what Dick Graham called it, and his regiment, which had been pretty well supplied with clothing of the same description, presented a very fantastic appearance the first time they went on dress parade.

You will remember that Rodney brought Dick home with him. Dick wanted to get into Missouri where his parents were, and in order to do that it was necessary that he should find some point on the Mississippi that was not guarded by Federal gunboats. They came from Camp Pinckney on foot, and had been doing duty as infantrymen for months, although their regiment was always spoken of as the —th Missouri cavalry. Their horses

had been "confiscated" by the commissary department during that dreary "mud march" from the disastrous battlefield of Pea Ridge to Van Buren and Pochontas. The commanding general, Van Dorn, did not need cavalry during that march, but it was necessary that his wagon train should go through ; so as fast as his jaded teams gave out and dropped in the road, he took cavalry horses to replace them, and in process of time the two Barrington boys found themselves on foot like hundreds of others.

You will remember, too, that when Rodney reached home he led his friend into the parlor and pushed him into an easy-chair with the words : "Stay here till I find somebody," and that his mother came in a moment later. The way in which the two greeted each other after their long separation was something of which Dick Graham could not remain an unmoved spectator, for it made him think of his own mother away off across the river, whom he might never see again. He staggered rather than walked to the window, and looked out at the oleanders in the yard.

“O Rodney, is it possible that you have come back to me at last!” exclaimed Mrs. Gray tearfully; and Dick knew, without turning his head, that she was holding her stalwart son off at arms’ length and giving him a good looking over.

“Yes, sir,” replied the returned soldier, placing his arm about his mother’s waist and leading her toward a sofa, “I have come back, and I have come to stay. The last words you said to me right out there on the gallery were that you never wanted to hear that I had failed to do my duty. You haven’t heard any such report as that, have you? I have done the best I could, but I have come back whipped; and I wish every other man who wears a gray jacket were honest enough to say the same thing.”

The listening Dick expected to hear his chum soundly rebuked for giving utterance to such sentiments, because he knew that the women were much more zealous for the cause of Southern independence than their male relatives, that they were exerting themselves to the utmost to keep the war spirit at fever heat,

and that, if it hadn't been for them, the army from which he had just been discharged would have dwindled to a corporal's guard long ago. By an accidental glance into a mirror that hung on a side wall Dick saw that Mrs. Gray was holding her soldier boy tightly clasped in her arms; but he did not hear her utter one word of reproach. Like many another mother's, her patriotism had been sorely tried, and now that Rodney had returned safe and sound she considered that she had done all for the cause that could be expected of her, and hoped that he would never leave her side again. Let some other mother's son—Mrs. Randolph's, for instance—take Rodney's place at the front.

“Say!” exclaimed Rodney, starting up all of a sudden. “What's the matter here? This room doesn't look just as it did the last time I saw it. Where's the carpet?”

“It was cut into blankets and sent to Corinth, along with a lot of other things that I thought might be of use to you ragged, shivering soldiers,” replied his mother.

“I hoped you would never be called upon to

make the smallest sacrifice," said Rodney in a tone of disgust.

"Do you think I made no sacrifice when I sent you to the field?" said Mrs. Gray reproachfully. "O Rodney."

"I didn't mean that," said the boy quickly. "But you don't want to rob yourself for the sake of those fellows up there," bobbing his head in the direction in which he supposed Bragg's army to be. "Like as not the poor, foolish woman who cut her shawl up to make these trousers of mine will suffer with cold for the want of it. But I am forgetting something. Come here, old fellow. Mother, you have often heard me speak of Dick Graham, the only brother I've got. Well, here he is. Rags and dust and all, that's Dick. Kiss him for his mother, and tell me where I will find father."

The lonely, homesick young Missourian was almost overwhelmed by the kindly greeting that Rodney's mother gave him, but his friend was quick to notice it and came to his relief. When his mother said that Mr. Gray had gone to Mooreville on business and might

not be back for an hour or two, he seized Dick by the arm and hurried him up to his room.

“I have known you a good while, but I never saw you look so glum before,” said he, as he closed the door and forced Dick into a seat.

“You may well say that,” replied the latter. “I bore up pretty well until I saw you and your mother together, and that knocked me. It’s a fur ways to Little Rock, and there are a good many Yanks on the road.”

“I’ll trust you and your discharge to get along with the Yankee cavalry if I can only see you safe over the river,” said Rodney. “There is where the fun is going to come in.”

“Don’t you think that the commanding naval officer, or the provost marshal at Baton Rouge, might be prevailed upon to give me permission to go over openly and above-board?” inquired Dick.

“Not much. You wouldn’t do it yourself if you were in their places. How would they know but that you were a spy or a bearer of secret despatches, and that your discharge was a humbug? I tell you, Dick, since I have had

time to think of the way those Yankee scouts treated us when they told us to come in out of the wet, I confess to a very friendly feeling for the Yankees. How many are there who would have run us in, just to be able to say that they had captured a couple of graybacks?"

"That's so," assented Dick.

"Now the best thing you can do is to stay with me long enough to rest your hands and face, say a week or such a matter, and then we'll go up to Vicksburg——"

"Suffering Moses!" exclaimed Dick. "There is a portion of two Yankee fleets up there, according to the last report I read, and they are fighting our fellows all the time."

"Well, say Port Hudson then. There hasn't been much of any fighting there. We'll buy a light, tight boat and provision it——"

Here Dick straightened up, and turned his pockets inside out one after the other to show that they were empty.

"I know what you mean by that," exclaimed Rodney, "but I'll see that you have all the money you want—money, I said, and not such stuff as that," he added, thrusting

his hand into his pocket and pulling out the roll of Confederate scrip that the paymaster had given him with his discharge. "Mother was wild for Southern independence when this thing was first started, but thought it wise to prepare for a rainy day; so she and father and I put away a little gold."

"If it wasn't for the fact that my father and mother did the same thing, I'd call you a traitor," said Dick.

"Oh, I know we are in good company," answered Rodney with a laugh. "And we don't think any the less of ourselves for putting away that gold, either. Think what a fix Washington's army was in when it was mustered out at Newburgh. Those men were victorious, but even victors must eat and have something to wear, and what did they have to live on? Do you suppose they would have thought seriously of mutiny if they had had a little store of hard stuff to fall back on? That's why we hid the gold; and it doesn't make any difference what sort of laws the government at Richmond passes, we are going to keep what we have. Now, let me show

you how much my old company thought of me.”

Although Rodney's room had been regularly cared for during the long months it had been without an occupant, he noticed, the moment he went into it, that nothing had been disturbed. A newspaper, which he had tossed upon the floor the morning he left, was lying in nearly the same spot yet; and his light fowling-piece was standing in the corner where he had placed it after shooting a hawk that was bothering Aunt Martha's chickens. He opened the door of his closet as he spoke, and almost without looking put his hand upon the elegant cavalry sabre that Bob Hubbard's Rangers had given him. The uniform he had worn while acting as drill-master, and his military saddle and bridle were there, too.

“I left them at home because I knew they would get me captured if I tried to take them into Missouri,” said he. “Now, pull off that picture-book,” he added, nodding toward Dick's silk blouse, “and after you have removed a little of the Louisiana soil from your features, put on this citizen's suit. I am not

sure it will fit you, but it is the best I can do until I see how trade is."

"I suppose gold is as potent in Baton Rouge as it was in Little Rock," said Dick. "But do you think our discharges will take us inside the Yankee lines?"

"We'll make them," replied Rodney. "We'll say that we want to report ourselves to the provost marshal and get a paper of some kind from him that will keep the Federal scouts from bothering us; and when we see him we'll bounce him for permission to trade."

The boys went to work to make such improvements in their personal appearance as they could with plenty of soap and water and Rodney's abundant wardrobe, and when a bell rang in a lower hall half an hour later, they answered it looking quite unlike the dusty ragamuffins who had walked unbidden into Mrs. Gray's front parlor. It is true that their coats were a little short in the sleeves and tight across the shoulders, but there were no holes in them or in the light shoes they wore on their feet.

"That's all O. K., mother," said Rodney,

catching a momentary glimpse of a well-filled table through the open door. "When you can't think of any other way to put in the time, just ask us if we want something to eat. Now come and sit down with us, and tell us everything that's happened since I have been in the army."

Rodney's entrance into the dining room seemed to be the signal that the house servants had been waiting for. The moment he stepped over the threshold they rushed in through every door, some smiling, some laughing outright, and all pushing and crowding one another in the effort to be the first to shake "young moster" by the hand. Foremost in the struggle was Rosebud, the darkey who had been Rodney's playmate in the days of his babyhood, and who yelled so dolefully when he went away. Although they all inquired particularly after his health, there was not one among them who asked what he thought of the Yankees as fighters now that he had had some experience with them. They knew as well as he did that he and his comrades had failed utterly in their efforts to take Missouri out of the Union.

Mrs. Gray could not describe in one dinner hour everything that had happened in and around Mooreville during the last fifteen months, nor could she do it in a dozen hours; and even at the end of a week she and her husband had many questions to answer as well as many to ask. But before he went to bed that night Rodney knew pretty nearly what Tom Randolph and his Home Guards had been doing, and how he and the enrolling officer stood in the community, and had been made to see at least one thing very clearly: the surest way for him to keep out of the army was to follow Ned Griffin's example and take a position as overseer on one of his father's plantations.

"I am overjoyed to know that you have decided to remain at home with us," said his father, "but, to be honest, I did not look for it, so I gave Griffin the best opening I had. Our upper plantation, as you are aware, is right in the middle of the woods; but I think Ned will be willing to make the change if I ask him."

"Not for the world," said Rodney quickly.

“I am used to living in the woods, so I will take the little farm and let Ned and his mother stay near civilization, where they can see white folks once in a while. Besides, I’d rather like to be within reach of the cotton you’ve got up there. A Northern paper that came into our hands just before we left Tupelo contained the information that there’s going to be trading allowed along the river, and what the Yanks especially want is cotton.”

“I don’t blame them,” said Mr. Gray, with a smile. “It is worth sixty cents a pound in New York.”

This piece of news almost took Rodney’s breath away.

“Four hundred and fifty bales at—let me see; \$270 a—— Great Scott, father! That doesn’t look as though you are going to be reduced to beggary.”

“But you must bear in mind that our cotton is not in New York, but concealed in the depths of a swamp,” said his mother; and Rodney afterward had occasion to recall the words when he was working night and day, with Sailor Jack’s assistance and Marcy’s

to keep this cotton out of the hands of rascals, both Union and Confederate, who were trying their best to take it from him by force or to cheat him out of it. This news was so very important that it could be talked of only in whispers ; and after the difficulties that lay in the way of getting the cotton into the hands of the traders had been discussed in tones so low that no eavesdropper at the door could have heard a word of it, Mrs. Gray said in her ordinary voice :

“ You boys have often spoken of having Northern papers in your possession. Did your officers permit that ? ”

“ Well, no, ” said Rodney, with a laugh. “ It was against orders to look at one of them, and I have seen men triced up by the thumbs for disregarding that order. ”

“ Then how did they get inside our lines ? ”

“ They were taken from dead Yanks, or out of the pockets of prisoners, ” replied Rodney. “ Sometimes they were handed over to an officer, or thrown aside to be picked up by other men who didn't care so much for orders ; and those who got them were mighty careful

to know who was around when they took them out to read them. Why, mother, I am telling you the gospel truth when I say that all the reliable news we army fellows got was what came to us through the columns of Northern papers, or from the mouths of Northern prisoners. But, as I was saying—\$120,000 and over. That's what your cotton is worth, father, and I will take the little farm so as to be where I can see it once in a while."

There were so many questions to be asked and answered that Rodney and Dick scarcely stirred out of the house during the whole of the next day. On the second day they rode out to call upon Ned Griffin and his mother, both of whom shed tears of joy and gratitude when they took Rodney by the hand.

"Yes; thanks to your father's kindness, I am here yet," said Ned, wiping his eyes, which grew misty every time he spoke of his benefactor, "though mercy knows how I am going to pay the debt I shall owe him when the terms of the conscription law are complied with. A hundred pounds of beef and bacon for every darkey on this place, big and little,

and beef and bacon worth—worth way up yonder,” said Ned, pointing to the ceiling. “It will take me a lifetime to pay it.”

“Oh, no, it won’t,” said Rodney encouragingly, “for if goods are high, your services will command wages in proportion; don’t you see?”

“Do you imagine that I will ever charge your father a cent after what he has done for me?” cried Ned indignantly. “I am not that kind of a fellow, and you ought to know it.”

“Well, I suppose that is sentiment, but it isn’t business,” said the practical Rodney. “Now, then, what do you know? Have you the straight of the fights the Home Guards had with those gunboats?”

Ned laughed until he was red in the face, and then went on to give the “straight” of one “fight” as he had heard it from indignant citizens of Baton Rouge, who had petitioned General Williams, the Union commander, to send a company of cavalry to Mooreville with orders to exterminate the Home Guards or drive them from the country. The boys heard much the same story from several disabled

veterans of Bragg's army, upon whom they called on their way home, and that was the way Rodney came to know so much about what had been transpiring along the river during his absence. He and Dick also learned from various sources that the enrolling officer would prove to be a jolly and entertaining companion when once they became acquainted with him, but as he was Tom Randolph's friend, they had better not trust him too far at first.

"Perhaps we'll not trust him at all," said Rodney. "We can tell better after we have had a look at him. As we are not in the Confederate service we are under no obligations to go near him; still he might look upon it as a courteous and friendly act if we were to drop into his office to-morrow and tell him 'hallo!'"

With this object in view they rode to Mooreville on the afternoon of the next day, and that was the time they saw Tom Randolph and frightened him nearly out of his wits, as we have recorded, by assuring him that he need not expect to take a squad of conscripts to

Camp Pinckney without having a brush with the Union cavalry. It was after they left him that they heard the hounds giving tongue in the woods; but such sounds were common enough in that country, and so they paid no attention to it, although they might have done so had they been able to look far enough into the future to see what was going to happen afterward.

When they reached the enrolling office Rodney found that he knew everyone there except the officer in charge; and as he shook hands with some and barely nodded to others, he told himself that they were just the sort of men he expected to find in Tom Randolph's company of Home Guards. There were a few industrious, hard-working ones among them, but the majority were long-haired, lazy vagabonds, who had never been known to earn an honest living.

"They're a pretty set to fight a gunboat," he whispered to Dick while the two were hitching their horses at the rack. "And I'll bet my roll of Confederate scrip against yours that they never take any conscripts to the

camp of instruction. I'll go farther, and say that they will never start with any, for when they are wanted they'll not be found. Now let's go in and see what sort of a chap we have to deal with."

Dick Graham put him down at once as a conceited prig, who did not know a thing outside of office routine, and was so disgusted with the airs he tried to throw on that he did not salute when he handed out his discharge; but Rodney, who did not care any more for the enrolling officer than he did for a crooked stick in the road, pursued a different course, and very soon succeeded in making Captain Roach ashamed of himself. He made him see that there was a big difference between a veteran soldier and a Home Guard, and ended by asking him to dinner.

"Now you've done it," said Dick, as the two mounted their horses and rode homeward. "If your mother had wanted that officer at her table, don't you think she would have asked him long ago?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Rodney. "We're privileged characters, and my folks

will back up anything we do or say. Besides, during the last three days I've got to be a policy man."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just this: so long as Captain Roach colloques with Tom Randolph and his mother—she's the one I am afraid of, for she is a schemer from the word go, I tell you—so long will he be more or less under their influence; and I am well enough acquainted with them to know that they would not hesitate to say or do anything that came into their heads if they thought they could set him against me. So I wanted the first chance at the captain. There's no telling at what moment he may be able to do us a good turn."

When the boys reached home they were surprised to find that there was a good deal of suppressed excitement among the servants, which showed itself now and then in spite of all their efforts to keep it concealed. Rodney's black playmate, who came to the steps to take charge of their horses, was full of news, but his master could not get anything out of him, although he threatened, if he did

not speak, to take him on board the gun-boats and sell him to the Yankees the first thing in the morning. When they went into the house they met Mrs. Gray, whose face showed that she was not altogether at her ease.

“What’s up?” demanded Rodney.

“Nothing more than we can expect in times like these, I suppose,” she replied, with a smile. “But the blacks are frightened, and of course that has an effect on me. There are four escaped Union prisoners in the vicinity, and some Confederate soldiers are pursuing them with bloodhounds.”

Dick Graham took note of the fact that she did not say “some of *our* soldiers,” as almost every other Southern woman would have done. He thought of the Federal scouts who had captured and released himself and Rodney a few days before, and said mentally:

“I hope they’ll not catch them. I wish we could find them long enough to hand them a bottle of turpentine. That would throw the dogs off their trail in short order.”

“ Well, what are the blacks frightened at ? ” continued Rodney. “ The Yanks don’t make war on people of their color. ”

“ But they know that there are two ex-Confederate soldiers in this house—— ” began Mrs. Gray.

“ Now I understand it ! ” exclaimed Rodney. “ And that was the reason Rosebud wouldn’t tell me what he had on his mind, though I promised to sell him if he didn’t. He was afraid that Dick and I would saddle up and go after those prisoners. Well, we’re not making war on Yanks so much as we were, so you can rest easy, mother. But how did you find it out ? We didn’t hear a word of it in town or along the road. ”

“ Three of the pursuing party rode into the yard not half an hour ago to tell me of it, and to ask if I thought any of our blacks would be likely to feed and shelter the Federals if they came on the plantation, ” answered Mrs. Gray. “ And I could only say truthfully that I was sure they would. The soldiers do not mean to give the poor fellows any rest, or the least chance to escape to the river. ”

“Hal-lo!” ejaculated Rodney. “Is a Yank a poor fellow in your estimation?”

“A weary and hungry man is always an object of pity,” replied his mother, “and such have never been turned from this plantation without having their wants relieved. And now the soldiers have gone and put those dreadful Home Guards after them.”

“Haw, haw!” laughed Rodney. “Tom Randolph’s Home Guards may be dreadful to unarmed Union men who have never snuffed powder, but veterans, such as I take these escaped prisoners to be, won’t stand in fear of them. Why, mother, if these four men were armed they would whip Tom’s whole company.”

“They are thoroughly armed,” said Mrs. Gray. “And when they are in need of food they walk right into a plantation house and demand it.”

“That’s all right too. You don’t expect men to go hungry when there’s grub in sight, just because they have the misfortune to be Yanks, do you? Where did they get their weapons?”

Mrs. Gray shuddered as she told the story as we have already heard it; and when she described how the fugitives had surprised, captured, and paroled a squad of six men who had been sent in pursuit of them, Rodney's face and Dick's beamed with admiration.

"I'll bet they are bricks," said the former.

"Top-notch," chimed in Dick.

"And do the Home Guards know that the Yanks are armed?" continued Rodney. "If they do, there isn't a man in the company who will join in the pursuit. They'll make a big show of going if Tom orders them out, but the first good chance they get they'll hide in the woods."

"And I don't know that I blame them," observed Dick.

"Nor me. There's no fun in walking up on an armed and desperate man when he is concealed and can see every move you make, while you cannot see hide nor hair of him. Mother," here he sunk his voice to a whisper, "I hope they won't catch those fellows; and if they come around this house I'll help them if I can."

“Here too,” whispered Dick; and Mrs. Gray never uttered a word of rebuke. The boys believed that she would help them herself.

When Mr. Gray came in the matter was talked over again, and he did not appear to be very anxious that the fugitives should be captured. On the contrary he discussed their chances of escape with great composure, and said he thought their prospects would be brighter than they were if they only had somebody with them who could show them how to throw off the dogs. These dogs were not intended to seize the fugitives, you will understand, but merely to overtake and hold them at bay until the soldiers could come up. Large packs of trained “nigger” dogs would sometimes pull down a single man when they found him in the woods, and it is a matter of history that some of our poor fellows who escaped from Andersonville were sadly torn by them.

But the four escaped prisoners in question did not come near Mr. Gray’s house that night; or if they did, Rodney and Dick never knew it. It was on the morning of the next day,

just as breakfast was nearly over, that the first exciting thing happened. Ned Griffin rode into the yard, and on his way to the back porch he passed along the carriage-way in front of one of the dining-room windows. Rodney had a fair view of his face as he rode by, and Ned looked through the open window and saw Rodney ; and in an instant a signal passed from one to the other—a signal so very slight that no one but a schoolboy would have noticed it, but it told Rodney as plainly as words that Ned had news for him that he did not want to divulge in the presence of any third party. So Rodney hastily excused himself and went out on the porch.

“ You look just as Rosebud did when I came home last evening,” said he, when he saw Ned standing at the foot of the steps holding his horse by the bridle. “ But I hope you will be more accommodating than he was, for he would not tell what he had on his mind.”

“ Say,” replied Ned. He looked all around to make sure that there was no else within hearing and then went on. “ You heard about those escaped Yankees, didn’t you ? ”

“I heard all about them. What of it?”

“They came to our house last night.”

“That’s all right. You treated them white, didn’t you?”

“I treated them the best I knew how. I thought you and your father wouldn’t care.”

“Of course not. But we would care if you had treated them any other way. What of it?”

“They want me to guide them to Baton Rouge,” continued Ned; and then Rodney noticed that the hand with which he held his bridle trembled like a leaf.

“That’s all right too, and I don’t see anything alarming in it. Why don’t you do it?”

“I am perfectly willing to do it, but you see they have got Tom Randolph with them and won’t give him up. They are bound to take him into the city as a prisoner, for they captured him in uniform.”

This astounding information almost knocked Rodney over. He sat down on the topmost step, rested his elbows on his knees and his chin on his hands, and looked at Ned without speaking.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ESCAPED PRISONERS' STORY.

“I TRIED my level best to induce the Yanks to let Tom Randolph go free, and so did mother,” continued Ned, slipping the bridle over his horse’s head and seating himself on the steps at Rodney’s feet, “but they wouldn’t hear to it. The worst of it is, they scared the life out of Tom and made him confess everything.”

“I am sorry to hear that,” replied Rodney, who had leisure, while Ned was speaking, to gather a few of his wits about him. “If Tom told how he persecuted unarmed Union men in this settlement he’s a goner sure enough, for there isn’t a soldier in the world who will stand such work as that.”

“I don’t believe he said a word about it,” exclaimed Ned.

“Then what in the name of sense did he have to confess?”

“About fighting those gunboats, you know.”

“He never fought any gunboats,” declared Rodney impatiently. “What do you suppose possesses him to stick to that lie every chance he gets? One would think he’d get tired of it after a while.”

“I asked him that very question when the Yanks permitted me to have a little private talk with him,” said Ned, “and the reason he gave was this: he had heard that brave men respected brave men, and he hoped his captors would treat him with a little more courtesy if they knew that he was a valiant soldier.”

Rodney Gray was utterly confounded.

“Valiant sol—— Great Scott! There isn’t a bigger coward in the Confederacy than Tom Randolph!” he exclaimed.

“But you see the Yankees don’t know that, and Tom has stuffed them so full of his ridiculous stories that they imagine they have got hold of a second Mosby or Morgan, and that he is worth keeping.”

“Did you tell them all this?” inquired Rodney.

“Of course I did ; but, although they know that I am a Union man and down on everything that looks like secession or rebellion, they would not believe me, and you will have to go up and try what you can do ; that is, if you feel like helping one who has always done his best to injure you.”

“I’d like to take Tom Randolph right out there in the carriage road and punch his head for him this minute,” replied Rodney, “but I am not coward enough to take vengeance on him in any other way. I’ll go, of course, but I don’t imagine they will pay any more attention to me than they did to you.”

“Yes, they will ; for they know you.”

“Know me ?” cried Rodney, opening his eyes wide with amazement. “I reckon not. I don’t know a living Yank.”

“Well, they know you, and Dick Graham as well,” insisted Ned. “They remember perfectly of reading your names on the discharges you showed when they captured you between here and Camp Pinckney.”

Rodney Gray had got upon his feet, but when he heard these words he sat down again.

He stared hard at Ned as if he were trying to understand something that was too hard for him, and shouted :

“Rosebud !”

“What are you going to do ?” asked Ned, when in response to the summons the darkey came tumbling out of the kitchen with a slice of bacon in one hand and a chunk of corn pone in the other.

“I am going to ask you to come into the house and tell your story to Dick and the folks from beginning to end,” answered Rodney. “Give your horse to Rosebud and come on.”

Ned Griffin followed his conductor with some reluctance, for he did not know what a man who had fitted out half a dozen partisan rangers, and who was a large slaveholder besides, might think of an overseer who gave aid and comfort to Union soldiers and abolitionists without saying a word to him about it. The quick-witted Rodney must have known what he was thinking about, for after placing Ned in a chair and carefully closing all the doors that gave entrance into the dining

room, he walked up to his father and whispered :

“Those escaped prisoners were up to Ned’s last night, and he is afraid you will think hard of him for giving them a bite to eat.”

“And loaning them blankets too, Mr. Gray,” chimed in honest Ned, who meant that his employer should know the full extent of his offending. “They had blankets enough first and last, but were so hard pressed by the dogs that they had to throw away everything except their guns.”

“Well, I assure you that I don’t think hard of you for giving hungry men something to eat and a bed to sleep on,” said Mr. Gray. “I should have done the same thing myself if they had applied to me ; but I trust you exercised due care while you were doing it.”

“I know what you mean, sir,” answered Ned, “and there isn’t a white person living who knows what happened on that plantation last night except my mother and Tom Randolph.”

A shell from one of the gunboats in front of Baton Rouge could scarcely have created

greater consternation in that room than Ned Griffin's last words. Mr. Gray thought that Ned's doings might as well be published in Richmond at once, and was about to say as much, when Rodney took a great load from his mind, and astonished him almost beyond measure at the same time, by quietly remarking that Tom was a prisoner in the hands of the Yankees, who were bent on taking him to Baton Rouge. Then he requested Ned to tell them just what had happened on his plantation the night before, and the latter gave the particulars substantially as follows :

The first Ned and his mother heard of the escaped prisoners was through one of the house servants, who declared with much earnestness that she could not remember just who told her the news, but it was in everybody's mouth, and some of the field hands, she didn't know who, had seen and talked with white men who had seen and talked with the Confederate soldiers who were following the trail of the fugitives. She did not try to conceal her joy when she informed Mrs. Griffin that "dem Yanks was boun' to get safe to de ribber,

kase dey had done pass Mooreville de night befo', and de houn' dogs had done been heard givin' tongue in de woods ten miles from Baton Rouge." Being intensely loyal to the Old Flag and friendly to those who wore the blue, Ned hoped from the bottom of his heart that this report was true ; but understanding the negro nature as well as he did, he could not believe more than half of it. He told his mother that there was a conspiracy among the slaves to shield those four men, and that they might be concealed on the plantation for a month, and no white person would know a thing about it. Consequently he was not prepared for what took place about an hour after dark.

He was in the act of blowing out his lantern after seeing that everything was snug for the night. He had been the rounds of the quarter to make sure that the darkeys were all in their cabins where they belonged, had shaken the padlocks on the corn-cribs and smoke house, assured himself that his yellow-legged chickens were all roosting high, and, being entirely satisfied with his day's work, was

preparing for a quiet evening with his mother, when there came a knock at the back door. Ned opened it, and saw his negro foreman standing there.

“Cæsar,” he exclaimed, “didn’t I leave you at your cabin not more than ten minutes ago? You ought to be in bed by this time.”

“Oh, yes, sah; I was dah,” replied Cæsar with a chuckle, “kase I knowed mighty well dat you’d be around to see if I was dah. But I—— Step out hyar a minute, please, sah.”

Ned went out, closing the door behind him, and was surprised as well as startled to find himself confronted by two men who carried guns in their hands. The night was so dark that he could not see their faces or clothing, and his first thought was that some of the Home Guards had come to pay him what their commander humorously called a “visit of ceremony.” If that was the case Ned knew that the house in which he lived would be ransacked and robbed, and he himself given notice to quit the country at once, or take such a whipping as the old time overseers used to give their negroes. But Cæsar’s next

words reassured him, although they did not lessen his astonishment.

“ You know dem Yankees what’s runnin’ loose in de woods ? ” he said in a low tone. “ Wal, sah, Moster Ned, dem’s um. ”

“ We hear that you are Union, and so we have made bold to come here and ask if you can give us a little help, ” said one of the men ; and Ned noticed that he did not speak like one who begged a favor. There was a ring of defiance in his tones, which under the circumstances was perfectly surprising.

“ Who told you that I am Union ? ” said Ned at length.

“ The darkeys. We know the name and politics of every man between here and the place where we were captured. Just now we are looking for supper and lodging. ”

“ But I care more for a pair of shoes than I do for eating and sleeping, although I am so tired that I could drop down where I stand and sleep for a week, ” said the second man. “ The hounds have driven us hard since we got away, and I have worn out all the foot-gear I could get or steal. ”

“We had some blankets and quilts yesterday,” added his companion, “but we had to throw them away this morning in order to make light weight through the thick woods. We would have been in rags if it had not been for our good friends, the darkeys.”

“I can supply your wants, and shall be glad to do so,” said Ned promptly. “But you must never mention my name where any of my neighbors can hear it. Come into the house, and Cæsar will stand outside to see that no one slips up on you. There ought to be four of you. Where are the other two?”

“We left them in the woods at the end of the lane, keeping guard over a prize we gobbled this afternoon,” replied one of the blue-coats; and when they were conducted into the room in which Mrs. Griffin was sitting they removed their remnants of hats respectfully, and dropped with something like a sigh of satisfaction into the chairs that Ned pulled up for them; but they held fast to their guns.

It took but a minute's time for Ned to explain the situation to his mother, and scarcely

longer to provide for the immediate wants of the two fugitives ; for when Mrs. Griffin said that they were welcome to everything there was in the house, the half a dozen black heads that filled one of the doors were quickly withdrawn, and in less time than it takes to tell it a plate filled with cold bread and meat was handed to each of the hungry blue-coats.

“ I’se mighty sorry I aint got some store coffee for you, honey,” said one of the women, who by virtue of her age and position took it upon herself to act as mistress of ceremonies. “ But I isn’t got none.”

“ We’re sorry for that, aunty ; not on our account, but on yours,” said one of the soldiers ; “ but it seems to me that you white folks ought to be able to get such things as coffee out here. There was lots of trading going on with country people when we left Baton Rouge.”

“ We’ve had a few things through the kindness of my employer,” replied Ned, “ and we hope to have more when I get a permit to trade myself. Mr. Gray thought it wasn’t best to trouble the provost marshal for too

many permits, for fear that he would shut down on all of them."

"Well, the marshal will not shut down on you, nor on any other Union man whose name we have on our list," said the soldier confidently. "We are not going to forget our friends, I assure you." And then he almost made Ned jump out of his chair by adding: "You spoke Mr. Gray's name just now; I suppose he is Rodney's father, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is," cried Ned. "But what do you know about him?"

"Not much, that's a fact; but we met Rodney once when he wasn't at all glad to see us. If we had been a different lot we might have put him and his comrade to some trouble, just to show what vigilant scouts we were."

"Do you mean to tell me that you belonged to the squad that captured Rodney and Dick Graham a few days ago?"

"We're two of them, and the others are in the woods, if our pursuers haven't found and gobbled them up. But I don't think they

have, or we'd have heard the sounds of the fight."

"Well, you'll not go away without seeing Rodney and Dick, will you?"

"That depends," answered the soldier, with a smile. "We are not on a pleasure trip and can't say beforehand just what we will do. The first thing for us to find out in the morning is whether or not our pursuers have placed themselves between us and the river. If they have, it might be well for us to remain in hiding a few hours, and give them time to get out of our road. But if they are still behind us, we ought to push on without loss of time. I don't suppose those two rebs would go back on us if they knew where we were. They said they wouldn't."

"Rodney and Dick!" exclaimed Ned indignantly. "While they were in the army they fought you Yanks the best they knew how; but I know what I am talking about when I say that you haven't better friends in your regiment or company than Rodney Gray and Dick Graham."

"I believe it," said the soldier earnestly.

“ We are not afraid to trust any man who met us in open battle ; but the Home Guards we *are* afraid of.”

“ You'd better be,” exclaimed Ned. “ The most of them are sneaks and cowards, and disgrace the uniform they wear.”

“ I believe that, too ; and now let me tell you why we are afraid of them. When we met your two friends Gray and Graham, we belonged to a squad of twenty men who were under orders to scour the country between the river and Camp Pinckney, so that we could give timely notice to General Williams if we discovered any considerable body of Confederates in that direction. The general has information that the enemy is going to try to open the river again, and, of course, he means to be ready for any rebs who come this way. After we told Rodney and his chum to go home and see their mummies, we rejoined our command, which we found about three miles down the road, and reported that we hadn't seen any graybacks and no signs of any ; and the very next day we were surprised and routed by a mixed body of

veterans and Home Guards which some good rebel had put on our track. We gave them a lively fight, but they were too many for us, and those of us who were not killed or captured were scattered far and wide.

“I hadn’t much of an idea of being taken prisoner, I tell you, and I have still less now. I’d rather be shot and have done with it. I had talked with some of our boys who had had experience as captives, and the stories they told were enough to make one’s hair rise on end. They did not have a word of fault to find with the rebel soldiers, who, so they said, always treated them well, but they gave it to the Home Guards good and strong, and declared that in future they would shoot every one that crossed their path. I could easily tell the Home Guards from the soldiers in that fight, both by their dress and the way they behaved under fire; and when I saw one of our boys killed after he had given up his gun, and saw that there was no possible chance for me to get away, I just avenged the death of my comrade by tumbling that Home Guard out of his saddle with the last cartridge I had,

and hunted up an old soldier and surrendered to him. My three comrades did the same, and that's the way we happen to be alive to-day.

“ We were kept with the main body about two hours, and during that time were used like white men. The veterans divided their grub with us, patted us on the back, and said we were good fellows for driving them out of Corinth and licking them on the river as we had been doing, and we had nothing in the world to complain of ; but I tell you we shook in our shoes when we learned that nine of us prisoners were to be sent to Camp Pinckney under a strong escort of Home Guards, while the soldiers kept to the road to hunt for more Yankees. And right there is where I blame the officer in command of the Confederate detachment,” said the blue-coat, now beginning to show such signs of anger and excitement that Ned Griffin would have been alarmed if he hadn't known that his loyalty to the flag was beyond suspicion, “ and if he ever falls into the hands of my regiment he will have cause to regret that act of his. He knew what manner-

of men his Home Guards were—that they were, as you say, sneaks and cowards, that they dared not go to the front, and that their highest ambition was to shoot a Yankee without running the risk of being shot themselves. But he told us to go, and when the order was given for us to fall in, we had to obey it. Well, sir, you may believe it or not, but I can prove it, we hadn't much more than got out of sight of the soldiers before those Home Guards began laughing and joking about losing us on their way to camp.”

“Did they think you were going to try to escape?” asked Ned.

“They meant that they were going to shoot us,” said the man fiercely.

Ned and his mother could hardly believe that their ears were not deceiving them.

“Thank goodness, our Home Guards are not as bad as that,” said the former.

“Have they ever been put to the test?” demanded the fugitive. “I know that they have fought gunboats and defeated some detachments of our cavalry, but did they ever have a Yankee prisoner in their hands?”

Ned was greatly astonished to hear that the Mooreville Home Guards had been in action with the Federal cavalry, but he managed to say that he didn't think they had ever taken a prisoner. Before he could say more the blue-coat continued :

“ I shouldn't like to fall into their power, for I believe they would make short work of me. The men who had been detailed to take us nine prisoners to camp came from the Pearl River bottoms, and looked, acted, and talked more like heathen than any men I ever saw before. Believing that we did not understand their jokes about losing us in the woods, they talked freely among themselves until we came to a place where the road forked ; and there they separated into two parties, four of their number taking my three comrades and myself down one road, while the rest of the escort went with the other five prisoners down the other road.

“ Before this happened I had made up my mind that I wasn't going to be killed by those long-haired Yahoos if I could help it, and that act of separation was two points in favor of

the plans I had formed in my mind. It gave me as companions three men who enlisted at the same time I did, who had served in my company and regiment all through the war, and who I knew could be depended on to back me up in anything I undertook, and it gave us four the smallest escort, the main body having gone down the other road with the rest of the prisoners. And I hope and believe that those five fellows got safely into camp, for the men who went with them were not half as villainous or blood-thirsty as those who guarded us. To show you what sort of men we had to deal with, one of them remarked, as he drew a big knife from his boot to cut off a chew of tobacco, that he wouldn't think any more of sticking that knife into a Yank than he would of putting it into a pig.

“I have been in some tight places since I joined the service, but I don't think I ever suffered as I did during the next fifteen minutes. It makes me sweat now to think of it,” continued the veteran; and as he spoke he drew his crooked finger across his forehead and threw off the perspiration which Ned saw

had gathered there like big drops of rain. "Being the only officer there was in our party—I was corporal, you know—my fellows naturally looked to me to do something, and I was fully aware of it; for I knew then as well as I do now that they had one and all determined to escape from those Home Guards or die in the attempt. I communicated with each of them by making the best use of my eyes I knew how, and could have yelled with delight when I saw that I made them understand me. Each of us selected a rebel and kept as close to him as he could without exciting suspicion. I was impatient to get to work, for I didn't know how soon they would begin work on us, but I was afraid to do anything until I thought we were well out of hearing of the party that had taken the other road. I was certain that there would be some shooting done during the fight, and did not want to draw their attention; but when I could stand it no longer I gave a yell, and floored my man as easily as you would pitch a bundle of oats on to a wagon. I had him out of his saddle before he could wink, and grabbed his carbine

just in time to help Ben here, who wasn't having as good luck as I."

"Did you kill both of them?" inquired Ned, who was so deeply interested in the narrative that he did not know whether he breathed or not.

"We laid them out," replied the veteran, "and as we were in something of a hurry, we didn't wait to see how long it took them to come to. It was all over in less than I have taken time to tell it, and there wasn't a shot fired or another yell raised. The fight was carried on so quietly that a person standing fifty feet away would not have heard it. We did not waste any precious moments in congratulating one another on our good fortune, but carried the bodies of our guards into the woods out of sight, dragged some brush over one or two little pools of blood there were in the road and over our footprints, thus concealing all traces of the struggle as best we could, and hitched the four horses among the trees where they would have plenty of leaves and twigs to browse on until they were released; and then we

struck out for the bottom the best we knew how."

"Whew! you have had a time of it," said Ned, as the corporal settled back in his chair, clasped his hands over his knee, and looked at his empty plate. "Lucindy, bring some more grub, and pile on all the plates will hold. When did you first become aware that the dogs were on your trail?"

"We found it out the first thing in the morning," was the reply. "Or rather, that was the time we learned that the rebs were going to use hounds to follow us up. We slept in the woods that night without a fire or a bite to eat, and at daylight set out to find a negro cabin; for we knew that the darkeys would befriend us if they could do so without bringing themselves into trouble. We came to a plantation after a while, and crept close enough to the quarter to discover a negro working about one of the corn-cribs. We attracted his attention without much trouble, but as soon as he made out who we were, he disappeared so suddenly that we were sorry we did not shoot him on sight, for we were

certain that he meant to betray us. So we made a little detour and took up another position in the field, from which we could watch the doors of the great house ; for there was where we knew danger would come from, if it came at all. By that move we came near losing a breakfast and missing some information that was of use to us, for that darkey had no intention of going back on us. He slipped around to his cabin, gathered up everything he had in the way of grub, and spent many valuable minutes in hunting us up. He had a story to tell us, but was so badly frightened that it was a long time before he could make us understand that the news of our escape had reached Camp Pinckney, that all the soldiers and Home Guards that could be spared from duty there had been sent in pursuit of us, and that a big squad of men had passed the house before daylight that morning vowing that they would never take us prisoners if they found us. They would shoot us in our tracks to pay us for what we had done to their comrades back there in the road.”

“Then they were Home Guards,” Ned interposed.

“Certainly ; and that threat proved it. But that was not by any means the worst news the darkey had to tell us,” continued the corporal, placing his gun on the floor by his side, and nodding to Lucindy as she handed him a second plateful of bread and meat. “And the part he hadn’t yet told was what frightened him. After much questioning he made us understand that there were six soldiers in the great house waiting for the breakfast that the missus had promised them ; and when they had eaten it, they were going down the road about half a mile after a pack of nigger dogs that were to be put on our trail. And then he assured us that if those dogs ever got after us we would be gone up sure ; for they were smart at following a trail, having had lots of practice in running down the unhappy conscripts who escaped from Camp Pinckney. That was bad news for us, as I said, and the question at once arose, Should we take to our heels and trust to luck, or would it be a better plan to rush into the house and put it out of

the power of the rebels to go after those dogs?"

"But were you not afraid to attack them in the house?" exclaimed Ned. "There were six of them and only four of you."

"A small difference in numbers to men who are working for life and liberty," answered the corporal. "We talked the matter over very quickly and decided, without a dissenting voice, that we would put a stop to that hound business before it had gone any further. We would take our chances on surprising the rebels while they were at breakfast, and be governed by circumstances when we found who and what they were. If they were regular soldiers we would simply parole them and let them go; but if they turned out to be Home Guards——"

The fugitive did not finish the sentence, but shrugged his shoulders and looked at Ned and his mother in a way that had a volume of meaning in it.

"It did not take us many seconds to determine upon a plan of operations," he continued, "and then we crept toward the house under

cover of the bushes and out-buildings, telling our friendly darkey to stay where he was till the trouble was over, and no one should ever hear from us that we had exchanged a word with him. Everything was in our favor. There wasn't a servant outside the house to run in and warn the inmates that we were coming, and before those six Johnnies knew that there was a Yank within 100 miles, we were in the breakfast room where they sat at the table, and had them covered."

"And what did they turn out to be?" Ned almost gasped.

"Regular soldiers, I am glad to say, and we were saved a most disagreeable piece of business. We told them they were in a trap, and could take their choice between going to the bone-yard and signing a parole not to take up arms against the government again until they were regularly exchanged, and they thought they had better sign; and it didn't take them a great while to say so, either."

"Had you any right to do that?" inquired Mrs. Griffin.

"Not the least in the world, madam," re-

plied the corporal, with a smile. "But as long as the rebels didn't know it, what was the odds? We couldn't take them with us, we couldn't shoot them, seeing that they were not Home Guards, and yet we had to do something. All we really hoped to accomplish was to frighten them off our trail long enough to give us a good start toward the swamp. We knew their officers would tell them that their parole didn't amount to a row of pins, but by the time they found their officers we might be miles away. There was one thing we were sorry for, and that was that they did not have their dogs in the house with them. They wouldn't have followed any more escaped prisoners when we got through with them, I assure you."

CHAPTER XII.

A HAIL AT THE BARS.

ALTHOUGH the corporal talked rapidly, he did not neglect his supper, and by the time he reached this point in his story his second supply of bread and meat was all gone. He handed back the empty plate, rested his gun across his knees where it would be handy in case of emergency, and drew from one of the pockets of his ragged blouse something that looked like a small bundle of brown wrapping paper.

“Yes, they concluded they’d better sign,” said he, with a laugh, “and here are their paroles. At first the lady of the house, who was disposed to be impudent and sassy until one of the rebs cautioned her that it might be worse for them if she didn’t keep still, declared that she had nothing at all in the way of writing materials; but when one of the Johnnies told her, with some impatience, that

if she didn't hand them out we'd be likely to go through her shanty, she produced the stump of a pencil and some paper that was so rough I could scarcely write on it ; but I made it do, and, would you believe it, one of my boys had to witness their signatures, for there wasn't one of the six rebels who could write his name. Of course we disarmed and dismounted them, and stood among the bushes in the front yard and saw them make tracks in the direction of Camp Pinckney ; but the hounds were put on our trail, all the same, and the next day they pressed us so close that we had to shoot some of the leading ones. And what surprised us was that those dogs would not attempt to follow our trail across a piece of wet ground. They would take a circle around it and pick up our trail again on the other side where the ground was dry."

"They'll do it every time," said Ned. "And it isn't a part of their training, either. That's the way they hunt deer and foxes, and it is something they pick up themselves without any teaching."

"Well, it's pretty bright in the dogs, I

must say, and we were sorry to shoot them, but there was no help for it. First and last we must have killed half or two-thirds of the pack, but they have been strongly reinforced ; for, judging by the yelping we heard to-day, there are more hounds on our trail now than there were at the start."

"You were very fortunate in being able to keep out of their way," said Mrs. Griffin, "and I don't see how you managed it."

"I don't either, madam ; but somehow we did it. We can't keep it up much longer, however, for we are nearly exhausted, and I wish from the bottom of my heart that we were in sight of those gunboats at this minute. But we'll get there in due time, and we'll not go empty-handed. We made an important capture this afternoon, and perhaps have saved our scouts and gunboats, as well as the Union people in the settlement, some trouble. It's a fortunate thing for him that we didn't know what he was when we first caught sight of him ; but as he was in full uniform we supposed he was a soldier and treated him accordingly."

“And—and what was he?” faltered Ned, while his mother looked anxious and bent forward in her chair to catch the corporal’s answer. Something told them that they were about to hear bad news.

“A miserable Home Guard and a captain besides,” replied the soldier. “Of course after he surrendered we couldn’t shoot him down in cold blood, as his kind would have served us if we had chanced to fall into their power, but we’ll put him where he’ll not fight any more gunboats for one while, I bet you.”

“How and where did you capture him?” was Ned’s next question. It wasn’t the one that trembled on his tongue, but it was as near as he could get to it.

“Why, we had been wading for two miles in a little bayou that brought us through a cornfield to the river side of the road, and at last we hid in a grove of evergreens from which we could command a view in all directions. We stayed there for an hour, listening to the faint baying of the hounds in the timber on the other side of the road, and never once dreaming that anybody would come near

us, when to our surprise we saw a gate open, and a single horseman ride down the lane that led straight to our place of concealment. I tell you we were scared, for we expected to see the dogs and all our pursuers come through the gate after him, but he stopped to put up the bars and then came on alone; and when he approached nearer we saw that he could not be one of the men we were looking for, because his horse was fresh and clean, and didn't have the splashed legs and body he would if he had been chasing us through the swamp for three days and more. We saw, too, that he and his horse were at outs about something, for every once in a while he would pound the animal with his whip as if he were very mad at him; and the last time he tried it, which he did when he was within less than a hundred feet of our hiding-place, the horse jumped and threw him as slick as you please, and I was glad of it. That was the time we rushed out and took him in."

"Did he tell you his name?" inquired Ned, and the words seemed to force themselves out against his will.

“Yes, he did ; and we think it strange that General Williams hasn’t abolished him and put a stop to his doings long ago. But none of us ever heard the name of Captain Randolph before. You know him, I suppose ?”

“Certainly, I do ; and I know that, so far as fighting is concerned, he is the most harmless man in the country. Did he tell you that his company had defeated some of your cavalry and been in action with the gunboats ?”

“He certainly did tell us just that,” replied the corporal ; and Ned and his mother thought he looked at them rather sharply.

“Well, there wasn’t a word of truth in it,” said the young overseer stoutly. He began to have a vague idea that he was injuring himself in the estimation of these two Federals by standing up for Tom Randolph, but he had gone too far to back out. He knew that Tom would not have uttered a word in his defence if their situations had been reversed, but that made no difference to Ned Griffin, who in few words gave the corporal a full history of Tom’s military exploits. The occasional raids through the settlement that Captain Randolph

had made at the head of his company Ned did not regard as military business, for their sole purpose was to intimidate Union men and increase Tom's importance; so he said nothing about them.

"If you are as strongly in favor of the Old Flag as I have been led to believe, I don't see what your object is in saying a good word for this Home Guard," said the corporal when Ned ceased speaking.

"Wouldn't you say a word for an old acquaintance of yours if you saw him in trouble, no matter whether he was your friend or not?" asked Ned in reply. "If you will give me time I can prove that I have told you nothing but the truth, and that Tom has deceived you from beginning to end."

"What do you suppose his object was in doing it?"

"He always does it every chance he gets. He knows he will never win a reputation by deeds of arms, and so he tries to win it with his mouth. He never did you Yankees the least harm, and he never will."

"Don't you think we have been here long

enough, Charley?" Ben asked of his non-commissioned officer; and he answered the question himself by getting upon his feet as if he were making ready to leave. He was plainly the more suspicious of the two, and showed in various ways that he didn't have much of an opinion of one who had so friendly a feeling for a Home Guard.

"We've been here too long," replied the corporal. "Our friends down there in the woods will think we are lost or have been gobbled up. May we trespass still further on your good-nature by asking for a bite for our absent comrades?"

"Lucindy, fill up the biggest basket you can find in the house," said Ned. "And Ben, if you will sit down a minute I will get shoes and stockings for you."

"And have you anything in the way of bedding?" inquired Mrs. Griffin. "The nights are cool, if the days are sultry."

No, they didn't have a thing except their guns and the dilapidated garments they stood in; and a blanket or two, if Mrs. Griffin could spare them, would protect them from the mos-

quitos if nothing more ; for of course it would be dangerous for them to build a smudge until they knew positively that their pursuers had been left behind. Ben was profuse in his thanks, and suggested that No. 9's would be about the right size for him ; and Ned went among the darkeys to find them, for he wore nothing larger than 6's, and couldn't boast of an extra pair of them. While he was gone his mother saw the basket filled and the blankets made into a bundle, and also found opportunity to say a word for Tom Randolph.

“What do you intend to do with him?” she asked.

“Turn him over to the provost marshal and have him sent North,” was the answer.

“If you do that you will kill his mother, and punish a man who is as innocent of any military achievements as I am,” said Mrs. Griffin. “You must not think that I am a friend of his—how can I be when he tried his best to have my son conscripted ? Why can you not parole him and let him go ?”

“We didn't parole those six rebels for fun, or because we thought the parole was bind-

ing," said the corporal with a smile, "but simply to delay them until we could get a start. If we turn Randolph loose, it will be out of gratitude to you and your son."

"Better knock him in the head," growled Ben.

"Don't mind him," said the corporal, seeing that Mrs. Griffin was shocked by the words. "Ben is down on all Home Guards because he saw one of them shoot his chum."

"But Tom Randolph was in no way to blame for that," answered the lady. "And I know that Rodney Gray would insist upon his release if he were here. Promise me that you will let him go; and when you are ready to start for the river, Ned shall take you there by the shortest and easiest course."

The corporal opened his lips to reply that he did not think it best to make any promises until he could consult the rest of his party, but before he could utter a word an incident happened that brought him and Ben to their feet in a twinkling, and drove all the color from Mrs. Griffin's face, leaving it as white as a sheet. First there was a terrific and sudden

outburst of yelps and growls from the small army of coon dogs that found a home on the plantation, and then answering yelps and deep-toned bays came from the direction of the front bars, mingled with the shouts of command and the sharp cracking of riding-whips. There was a second's oppressive silence, and a strange voice called out :

“Hal-lo, the house !”

“Coming, sir! Get out, you whelps!” shouted Ned Griffin's voice in reply ; and presently the frightened inmates of the house heard him running around the corner toward the bars. The corporal and his comrade, who stood with their guns in readiness, seemingly as much at their ease as they had been while sitting quietly in their chairs eating the bread and meat that had been provided for them, looked inquiringly at Mrs. Griffin.

“They are strangers and have hounds with them,” said the latter, in a terrified whisper. “I fear the worst, but Ned will do what he can.”

“I certainly hope he will keep them out of the house,” answered the corporal calmly,

“for if he don’t, some of them will never see the sun rise again.”

Ned Griffin, who had had no trouble at all in inducing one of the field hands to hand over a pair of stockings and his best shoes for the benefit of the bare-footed soldier in the house, was almost ready to drop when he heard that racket at the front bars, but he answered the hail without an instant’s hesitation, tossing the stockings and shoes into the nearest bush, and ran to the road, knowing that he would meet a party of Confederate soldiers and a pack of “nigger” dogs when he got there; but did the soldiers know or suspect that the men of whom they were in pursuit had sought aid and comfort in that house?

“They can’t know it or suspect it, unless somebody has betrayed us; and if that has happened it is all up with Ned Griffin,” thought the young overseer; and when he reached the bars and caught sight of the party on the other side, he did not feign surprise, but said, as any other honest, hospitable boy would have done: “Alight and hitch. I knew it was you the minute I heard

the music of your hounds. Did you catch them?"

"No," replied one of the men, who wore some sort of insignia on his collar to show that he was an officer. "They gave us the slip about eleven o'clock this morning, and we haven't been able to find their tracks since. But we——"

"Say!" interrupted Ned suddenly. "Please don't let your big hounds come over the fence and eat up my pups. I need them to catch wild hogs with next winter."

That was very true, but it was not the reason Ned did not want the hounds to come inside the yard. He was afraid that some of them might go foraging on their own hook; and if they wandered around to the back door in search of something to eat, they could not help striking the trail the two escaped prisoners made when they entered the house. They would be sure to recognize it on the instant and give tongue, and then there would be trouble indeed; for Ben and the corporal would fight till they dropped before they would be recaptured. And then what would be done to him

and his mother for feeding and trying to conceal them? But the hounds were thrashed and scolded back into the road and the officer continued :

“ We will get the start of them to-morrow. If they are in this neighborhood they will stay here, for we are going to place ourselves between them and the river. But we were well fed and rested at a house three miles back, so we'll not alight, thank you. Are we on the road to Mooreville? That's what I called you out for.”

“ Keep straight ahead, and you can't miss it,” said Ned. “ And if you want to go toward the Mississippi, take the first right-hand road. But look out for the Yanks. I haven't seen any of their critter fellers, but there may be some between here and Baton Rouge.”

“ If we run on to them before we know it, it will be our fault, won't it? Good-night. Forward, trot, gallop!”

The young overseer, feeling as if a mountain had been removed from his shoulders, stood leaning on the bars until the sound of

the horses' feet had died away in the distance, and then he settled himself into a comfortable position, drew a long breath, and waited fifteen minutes longer in order to make sure that the rebels had really gone on toward Mooreville. While he was waiting Cæsar came up, expecting to receive a good scolding, and perhaps something worse, for neglect of duty.

“Sho’s you live, Marse Ned, I watch and wait wid all my eyes and ears, and dey slip along de road and up to de bars’fore I knowed it,” he said earnestly. “You know ole Cæsar aint going to sleep wid two Yankees in de house and rebels all around.”

“That’s all right. I was out of doors, and didn’t know they were at the bars until they hailed. Now, stay right here and see that they don’t steal a march on us. If you hear the slightest sound down the road Mooreville way, slip into the house and let me know it.”

Ned went back to the bushes where he left the stockings and shoes, and when he carried them into the house he found no one there except his mother, who was plying her needle as if nothing had happened. The two fugi-

tives had disappeared, and there was not a darkey to be seen.

“Open that door and you will find them,” said Mrs. Griffin, when Ned stopped and looked all around. “They thought they would rather fight it out downstairs than in the garret, for they would have a better chance to run.”

“They can’t go any farther to-night, for their pursuers are riding hard to get between them and the river, and may send the hounds into the woods at any time. And I am glad of it,” whispered Ned. “I’d like to keep them until I can go for Rodney. Perhaps he can do something for Tom Randolph. Why, mother, did you ever hear of such a lunatic? If he gets out of this scrape I don’t think he’ll ever let his tongue bring him into another.”

Ned pushed open the door, and the two escaped prisoners came out. In few words they were made acquainted with the result of the interview that had taken place at the bars, and Ned and his mother did not wonder that it had a depressing effect upon them. After racing through the almost impassable woods

and swamps until they were ready to drop with fatigue, it certainly *was* disheartening to know that the enemy had come so close to them when they imagined themselves safe for the night. They decided that they had better return to their companions at once and talk the situation over with them.

“All right,” said Ned. “I will go with you, for I want to see what Tom Randolph has to say for himself. If you will take my advice, you will stay pretty close about this plantation until you have seen Rodney Gray. He can do more for you than almost anybody else in these parts, and if you get into trouble you’ll find it so.”

The blankets and the basket of provisions were brought from the room in which they had been hastily concealed, and the fugitives lingered a moment to shake hands with Mrs. Griffin and tell her how grateful they were for the generous treatment they had received at her hands and her son’s.

“There is one way in which you can show it,” replied Ned’s mother, “and that is by releasing your prisoner.”

“But, madam, we have no right to do it,” said Ben, who was inclined to put more faith in Tom’s story of his exploits than he did in Ned’s. It was natural, under the circumstances, for him to believe that Ned’s regard for the truth was not so strong as his desire to shield an old acquaintance. “We are bound to take him before our colonel and state the case to him; and if *he* has a mind to let him go—why, all right.”

“Haven’t you the same right to release Tom Randolph that you had to release Rodney Gray and his friend?” inquired Mrs. Griffin. “You did not think it necessary to take them before an officer?”

“Perhaps I did stretch my authority just a little,” said the corporal, coming to Ben’s assistance. “But almost any non-com., who wanted to be half white, would have done the same thing. Rodney and Graham had discharges in their pockets, while this man Randolph holds a commission as captain of Home Guards at this minute. But we’ll tell the boys what you have done for us, Mrs. Griffin, and let them decide the matter. I hope it

may be our good fortune to meet again under pleasanter circumstances. Good-night."

Ned led the way from the house and along the lane that ran through the negro quarter to the woods, in which the corporal's two comrades and their prisoner were impatiently awaiting their return. They moved silently and without exchanging a word above a whisper, but the dark-skinned inmates of the cabins seemed to be on the watch. One door after another was softly opened, and suppressed voices, that were rendered husky by emotion, cheered them with such expressions as :

"Lawd bress Marse Linkum's sojer boys! Youse boun' to whop de rebels, honey; I know you is, kase Ise praying for you free times a day, like Dan'l in de lion's den."

"I certainly hope you'll not get into any trouble through what you have done for us to-night," said hard-hearted Ben, who was moved in spite of himself by these expressions of sympathy.

"So far as I know, our blacks are all loyal," answered Ned, "but it won't do to trust some

negroes too far, any more than it will do to trust some white people; and when we are in the presence of Tom Randolph I wish you would be careful not to——”

He stopped suddenly, but it was too late. He had committed himself. As he afterward told his friend Rodney, he came near ruining everything before he thought what he was doing.

“There you have it!” exclaimed Ben angrily. “Why do you try to befriend that man Randolph, when you dare not trust him for fear that he will set your rebel neighbors against you? He shall never go free with my consent, and that is a word with a bark on it.”

“Or are you afraid that he will get his Home Guards together and burn you out, to pay you for what you have done for us Yankees?” said the corporal. “I don’t believe there’s a Home Guard in the world that will do to tie to, and I think the best thing we can do is to hold fast to that fellow. If he’s done us half the damage he says he has, he is a prize.”

Ned’s common sense told him that words would not rectify the big mistake he had

made, so he dropped Tom Randolph entirely, and talked of the hounds and the risk his Yankee friends would incur if they tried to make their way to the Mississippi through the comparatively open country that lay before them. There were not woods enough to conceal their movements ; the people along the route were mostly rebels, and they could hardly help meeting someone who would put their pursuers on their track if he saw half a chance. What they needed more than anything else during the rest of their journey was a guide known to be a good Confederate, but friendly enough to Yanks to help them out of trouble if they got into it. The two fugitives did not think they were likely to fall into such trouble as Ned hinted at, but the next day they were obliged to confess that he knew what he was talking about.

By this time they had reached the fence that ran across the end of the lane and shut it off from the woods, and there Ben and the corporal stopped as if expecting something. It came presently in the shape of the challenge given in low tones :

“ *Who* comes there ? ”

“ Friends with the countersign,” replied the corporal.

“ Halt, friends. Advance one with the countersign, and have your head blown off if you don’t give it right,” continued the voice ; and although the words seemed to be spoken in a jest, Ben and Ned remained by the fence while the corporal climbed over it and disappeared in the bushes. A moment afterward he called to them to come on, and when Ned joined him he knew that he was in the presence of the other two fugitives and Tom Randolph. It was made plain to him at once that Tom had sent the corporal and his comrade to the house with the assurance that they would find Union people there and plenty to eat, for Tom said :

“ Did you find Griffin ? ”

“ They not only found me, but brought me here to see you,” said Ned, answering for himself, and working his way slowly through the dark in the direction from which Tom’s voice came. “ And I am sorry to find you in this fix.”

Captain Randolph may have borne up bravely enough while he was alone with his captors, but the sound of a familiar voice and the warm grasp of Ned's hand unnerved him completely. He drew the young overseer to a seat on a log beside him, rested his head against his shoulder, and shook as if he had the ague; but whether it was with fear, or with the violence of the struggle he was making to keep up the character he had so foolishly assumed, Ned could not tell. There had been a time when Tom Randolph would have been ashamed to rest his head against an overseer's shoulder; but he was pretty well humbled now. It was at this juncture that Ned was allowed a few minutes' talk with Tom, the soldiers being busy with their own affairs—two of them in describing what had happened at the house, and the others in disposing of the contents of the provision basket.

“Tom,” said Ned, “you never told these Yankees that you had whipped their cavalry and fought the gunboats.”

“Yes, I did,” answered the captive; and the overseer was not much surprised to notice

that his voice was choked with sobs. "I took them for brave men, and thought they would extend a brave man's treatment to me if they knew me to be a loyal soldier of the Confederacy."

"Well, do you know that you have got yourself in a scrape that may end in your being sent to a Northern prison?"

"Oh, don't tell me that," gasped Tom. "That's what they have been threatening me with, and you must make them let me go. You can do it, for you are known to be Union, and my father will reward you beyond——"

"And you are not a loyal soldier of the Confederacy," continued Ned, who wasn't be-friending Tom in the hope of making anything out of it. "You are nothing but a Home Guard; and these men have reason to hate Home Guards."

"I know it," groaned Tom. "But am I to blame for anything those Pearl River heathen did to them? You are my only hope, Ned, and you'll have to get me out of this. You must."

"There's no must about it. I have said

everything I could, and so has mother. Your only hope is Rodney Gray."

"Then send for him," said Tom nervously. "Send for him at once, and say that if he will stand by me now, he can command me and my father ever afterward. I wish the men who are responsible for this war were here in my place and sentenced to be shot at sunrise. I have been deceived and badgered ever since I sided with the Confederacy; I've stuck by her through thick and thin, while those who deserted her at the first sign of disaster are hail-fellows well met with the Yanks in Baton Rouge, and live on the best the land affords. They have salt and tea and coffee in their houses, and white flour; and we have none. You must help me out, Ned."

Tom Randolph continued to talk in this rambling way until the corporal interrupted him with:

"Well, boys, we have decided to stay here to-night."

"And will you let Griffin go for Rodney Gray the first thing in the morning?" exclaimed Tom.

“Griffin isn’t a prisoner, and can go and come as he likes,” replied the non-commissioned officer indifferently. “It’s a matter that concerns you more than it does us. If Griffin has a mind to go or send for Rodney Gray, we shall be glad to see him.”

“These are the Yanks who captured Rodney and Graham while they were on their way home,” whispered Ned. “That’s why I say that Rodney can help you if anybody can.” Then, without giving Tom a chance to express his surprise, he said aloud : “What’s the use, Yanks, of staying here all night in the dark and cold? If you will come to the quarter, I will give you a tight cabin and a bright fire to cheer you up.”

The offer was a tempting one to men situated as they were, but after a short consultation with his comrades the corporal thought they had better not accept it; they would feel safer and sleep more soundly right there in the woods. Then Ned suggested that they should wrap themselves in the blankets and get what rest they could while he stood guard, and to his surprise and Tom Randolph’s un-

bounded delight, the proposition was accepted without an instant's hesitation. To keep up appearances Tom took the blanket that was passed to him and rolled himself up in it; but he had no intention of going to sleep. He had another idea in his head, and it was just about as foolish as his notion of trying to pass himself off for a soldier when he was nothing but a Home Guard.

“Good-night, Johnny; and many thanks for that grub and this warm blanket,” said one of the escaped prisoners who had not spoken before.

“Good-night, Yank, and welcome,” replied Ned. “But I am not a Johnny.”

“And neither am I a Yank,” said the soldier. “I came from Michigan. But good-night.”

After that silence reigned in that dark, lonesome camp for the space of half an hour. The soldiers were weary and sank into a deep slumber almost as soon as they had adjusted their blankets to suit them; but Tom Randolph was wide awake. He curbed his impatience until the heavy breathing of his captors

told him that they were in a state of unconsciousness, and then said cautiously :

“Ned, Ned! Have you got a gun?”

“No. What do I want of a gun?” was the answer.

“Where are they?”

“Wrapped up in the blankets with the soldiers, most likely.”

“Well, say, Ned; look here,” whispered Tom coaxingly.

“It’s no use, for I can’t do it,” replied Ned, who knew what the captive was about to say.

“You don’t show your usual good sense in asking it of me, either.”

“But you could drop asleep, couldn’t you, and let me crawl away?”

“I could, but I won’t. I’m not going to get myself into a scrape by going back on these Yanks. They’d shoot me.”

“But you might go with me,” suggested Tom, who was almost ready to shed tears again.

“And leave Mr. Gray’s property to be destroyed?” demanded Ned. “I said I’d keep guard, and I’ve got to do it.”

“Well, you have been weighed and found

wanting," said Tom desperately. "I know just what you are now, but I was foolish enough to think you were a friend of mine."

"You didn't think anything of the sort. You knew better," said Ned; and after that he relapsed into silence. He had proved that he was ready to assist Tom in any way he could, but he wasn't going to arouse Ben's rage and the corporal's by permitting him to steal away in the darkness. It was the most senseless proposition he had ever heard of, and he was glad that Tom did not trouble him with it again. The latter lay so quiet that his guard thought he was asleep, but he wasn't. He was trying to think up some way to get even with Ned.

Although the overseer was not at all drowsy, the exciting events of the last few hours having banished slumber, he passed a dreary night on his log, leaning against a tree, and listening for the first far-off baying of the hounds, which would announce that the pursuit had been renewed. But the hours dragged themselves away without disturbance of any kind, and at daylight the corporal threw off

his blanket and sat up. He felt like a new man after his refreshing sleep, and that was what all his comrades said when they were aroused. Then a short consultation was held, and Ned posted off to the house with the empty basket. It was full of eatables when he returned an hour later, to learn that during his absence the fugitives had decided that Tom Randolph's story was more worthy of belief than his own.

"It doesn't stand to reason that a man would tell such damaging things about himself just for fun," said the corporal, who spoke for all his companions. "He was as defiant as you please when we captured him, and I believe——"

"But I told you a pack of lies ; I did indeed," cried Tom, hiding his face in his hands.

"We don't believe it," answered the soldier. "Your weakening is all put on, because you have learned that it isn't such a funny thing to be a prisoner as you thought it was. And even if you did lie to us, you are a Home Guard, and that is against you. If you haven't done any mean things it's because you haven't had the chance."

To Tom Randolph's rage and disgust Ned did not try to combat this decision. He simply said :

“All right ; just as you say. Keep a stiff upper lip, Tom, and I will go and get Rodney.”

This was the substance of the story that Ned Griffin told while he was sitting in Mrs. Gray's dining room on the morning of which we have spoken. Of course he did not tell it exactly as we have tried to, but he told enough to give his auditors a clear idea of what had happened on his plantation the night before. They heard him through without interruption, and when his narrative was ended they settled back in their chairs and looked at one another. There was one thought uppermost in their minds : those escaped prisoners deserved their freedom after working so hard for it, even if they were Lincoln hirelings ; and Rodney must see them safe to the river. As to Tom Randolph—they did not waste much sympathy on him, but they were sorry for his mother. Tom took just such chances as these when he put on his gray uniform.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAPTAIN TOM SHOWS HIS GRATITUDE.

WHEN Ned Griffin brought his exciting narrative to a close Mrs. Gray beckoned him to a seat at the table and gave him a cup of coffee, while Rodney sent one of the girls to his room after a couple of overcoats, and Rosebud to the stable to see the saddle put on his horse and Dick's. He was elated over the prospect of doing even a little to help the Federal soldiers who had shown themselves so friendly to himself and his chum, and determined that Tom Randolph should not go to a Northern prison if he could prevent it. Tom was an old acquaintance and a near neighbor, and that meant a good deal to Rodney Gray. Ned was a little apprehensive that his employer might not be altogether pleased with what he had done, but to his relief Mr. Gray did not have a word of fault to find.

“Rodney seems to have made up his mind

to help those Yankees through," said he, addressing himself to the overseer, "and I need not tell you that I shall be glad to have you do anything you can to aid him and them. As to Tom—it looks now as though he would have to stand punishment for his foolishness."

"And how about me?" said Rodney. "It looks as though I was planning to get myself into trouble. If I help the Yankees, my Confederate neighbors will be down on me; and if I help Tom, they'll *all* be down on me—rebels and Union."

"How are the neighbors going to find it out?" inquired Dick.

"Oh, Tom will tell them," said Rodney carelessly.

"And are you going to help a man who will turn around and blab it on purpose to bring you into trouble?" exclaimed Dick. "I should think his gratitude——"

"Gratitude is the rarest sentiment in the world, my dear boy, as you will learn long before your head is as white as mine. He'll do me a mean turn the first good chance he gets. That's the kind of a chap he is. Have you

got your discharge in your pocket? All right. I don't know when you will see us again," said Rodney, when the overcoats made their appearance and the horses were brought to the door, "but when we return we hope to have some better fitting clothes than these, and a pass from the provost marshal. So, mother, if you have any currency that you can spare I shall be glad to have some."

These last words were whispered into the ear of his mother, who led him to her room, where she kept a small store of specie for an emergency. Where the rest was Rodney did not know or care to inquire. It was enough for him that he could get a few pieces as often as he found it necessary to ask for them.

"Now, do be careful," pleaded his mother. "Suppose the hounds strike your trail in spite of all you can do to prevent it, and the soldiers with them find you and Dick in the company of the escaped prisoners! Your discharges would not save you."

"Don't cross a bridge till you come to it, mother," answered Rodney, who had thought of all this while Ned Griffin was telling his

story. "We are not going into any danger. Good-by."

In a few minutes the boys were riding post-haste toward Ned's plantation. They reined up to the house and turned their horses over to a darkey as any casual visitors would have done, for Ned told them that the rest of their journey must be made on foot and under cover of bushes and fences.

"There's no telling who may be on the watch," said he, "or whether all our blacks are as loyal as they pretend to be. And, boys, don't say a word in Tom's hearing about showing the Yanks the way to the river. He'll take it for granted, of course, that somebody is going to do it, but we'll make it hard for him to prove it on any of us."

Rodney did not waste many minutes in comparing notes with Mrs. Griffin (he already knew everything she could have told him), but threw his overcoat across his arm and motioned to Ned to go ahead with the basketful of things that had been provided for the fugitives' dinner. It took them three-quarters of an hour to reach the edge of the woods, so

slow and cautious were they in their movements, and they found two of the soldiers at the fence waiting for them. Rodney and Dick recognized them on the instant, and shook hands with them through the fence as cordially as though they had always been the warmest of friends.

“Say,” whispered Rodney, as soon as the greeting was over. “Call up the corporal and the other Yank. I have a few words to say to you that I don’t want your prisoner to hear.”

“Are you afraid of him, too?” asked one of the soldiers. “Then I can’t understand why you are so anxious to have him go free. We can’t leave him in camp alone, for if we do he’ll run off.”

“He hasn’t the pluck to try it,” said Ned, passing his basket over the fence. “But I’ll stay with him. You are not afraid to trust me, I suppose, after allowing me to stand guard over him all night.”

But Ned hadn’t told of the astounding proposition Tom made while he was standing guard over him. That was something he kept to himself until he told his story in Mrs.

Gray's dining room. He climbed the fence and disappeared in the woods, and presently the corporal and the "other Yank" came up.

"If anyone had told me that I'd ever shake hands with a rebel in this friendly way, I should have said he didn't know what he was talking about," said the corporal. "Johnny, how are you by this time? You and your chum must have got safe home or else you wouldn't be here. You know our story, of course, so there's no need of telling it over again."

"No need and no time," replied Rodney, "for you ought to be jogging along now. You've an open and dangerous country before you, and very likely every man in it is on the lookout for you."

"That's about what Griffin said to us last night," replied the corporal. "We asked him to act as our guide, but he thinks you can be of more use to us."

"I don't know about that; but I will do my best on one condition."

Of course the soldiers knew what that condition was, but listened patiently while Rod-

ney went on to tell them that they never made a greater mistake in their lives than they did when they put faith in Tom Randolph's story and rejected Ned Griffin's. He urged them to release Tom without any more nonsense, and hinted that the sooner they complied with his request, the sooner he would be ready to start with them for Baton Rouge. He also added :

“If you are bound to take Tom with you I can't go, and you'll have to do the best you can for yourselves. He'd find means to let my rebel neighbors hear of it, and then I'd have to go among the Yanks or back to the army ; for I couldn't live here. What do you say ?”

“What do you say, boys ?” inquired the corporal, turning to his companions. “He's a Home Guard, and a mighty mean one, too, judging by——”

“None of that, please,” Rodney interposed. “Having submitted the case, you have no business to keep on arguing it. Yes or no, Yanks ?”

“I wish we had knocked him on the head

before we took him prisoner," said Ben, who could not forget his lost comrade.

"But you didn't, and you can't very well do it now," replied Rodney. "Are you going to let him go or not?"

Ben did not answer; but his three companions gave a favorable, though very reluctant response to Rodney's question, and the latter drew a long breath of relief. Ben looked and acted ugly, and if he had been a little better talker Tom Randolph's chances for liberty and life would have been slim indeed. As Dick Graham afterward explained it, Tom was saved by Ben's want of gab. Rodney's next care was to urge upon the soldiers the necessity of sending Tom about his business with the least possible delay, and of being careful to drop no word in his hearing that would give him a hint of their future movements. Tom would make all sorts of promises, but they must not put the least faith in them, for if he saw an opportunity to do it, he would put a squad on their trail in less than an hour. This done, he and Dick climbed the fence and followed the soldiers

toward the camp. Ned Griffin had had time to prepare Tom for Rodney's coming, and the expression Rodney's face wore when he appeared in sight prepared him for the good news.

“You have prevailed upon them to release me and I know it,” he exclaimed, seizing one of Rodney's hands in both his own and shaking it with all his might. “And I'll never forget you for it; never in this world. If you want anything, all you've got to do is to say the word, and if I've got it you shall have it. And as for you soldiers—I'll cook up some sort of a story when I reach home that will stop all pursuit till you have had time to reach the Union lines. I am very grateful to you, and will prove it by pulling off my gray suit as soon as I get home. If all Yanks are like you, I am not going to fight any more during the war.”

Tom was sure he saw a faint prospect of escape before him, and his joy was so great that it choked his utterance. He continued to rattle on in this way, until the corporal interrupted him with :

“That’s all right, Johnny. So long as you keep the hounds off our trail, it’s all the return we ask for setting you at liberty.”

“Then you are going to release me, aint you?” cried Tom.

“I don’t suppose such a thing was ever done before,” said the corporal hesitatingly. “And I don’t know what the boys will say to me when they hear of it; but I——”

“That don’t make any difference, Mr. Soldier. You just tell me to go home, and I will keep the hounds off your trail.”

“Well—git!” said the corporal. “You will find your sword and revolver back there in the grove where we hid them yesterday.”

Tom lost no time in grasping the corporal’s hand and shaking it with all his strength—a proceeding to which the boy in blue submitted with very bad grace. He felt more like giving his late captive a kick, and so did his comrades; but they let him shake their hands instead—all except Ben, who put his hands into his pockets and turned away when Tom approached him. Captain Randolph would have persisted in his efforts to take leave of him

also, had he not been warned by a look from Rodney that he had better stop his nonsense and get away while the Federals were in the humor to let him go. Acting upon the hint, he turned away from Ben and disappeared in the direction of the fence.

“If I am any prophet that surly Yank will see the time when he’ll wish he had not turned his back on me in that style,” soliloquized Tom, when he found himself safe in the lane. “I’ll square accounts with him and with Rodney and Dick at the same time. And Ned Griffin, too. I might have given those Yanks the slip last night, if he had been friendly enough to fall asleep as I wanted him to do ; but he wouldn’t, and now he will see how I will pay him for it.”

Tom sped along the lane as if he had been furnished with wings, through the negro quarter and up to the door of the plantation house, where Ned’s mother was waiting for him. She had moved her low rocking chair to that door, and had been waiting there ever since she saw Rodney Gray and his two companions disappear in the woods at the end of the lane ; for

she felt the keenest anxiety for Tom, and wondered what his mother would do if Rodney failed in his efforts to have him released.

“O Tom, I am so glad to see you,” she exclaimed, as soon as the captain of the Home Guards came within speaking distance.

“I am a free man once more, Mrs. Griffin,” replied Tom loftily, “and it is a fortunate thing for some people whose names I could mention. If I had been kept a prisoner, my Home Guards would have made sad work in this settlement. I’ll thank you to lend me a horse. I want to reach home as soon as I can, in order to relieve my mother’s anxiety.”

And this was all he had to say to the woman who had done more than anybody else to keep him out of prison. By her kindness and generosity she had won the gratitude of Tom’s captors and made it comparatively easy for Rodney to effect his release; and although Tom did not know this, he did know that Ned had done his best for him, and one would think he might have had a civil word for Ned’s mother. Instead of that he hinted darkly at some things he knew about “some people

whose names he could mention," and Mrs. Griffin knew that that was the same thing as a threat. She replied that she did not feel at liberty to lend Ned's saddle-horse without saying a word to him about it, but Tom could have a mule if he wanted it; and with the words she went into the house, leaving Captain Randolph to stand alone at the door until the mule was brought up.

"This is another insult I shall have to remember against the Griffins," thought Tom, running his eye over the ill-conditioned animal that was finally led to the door. "Now, how shall I manage to have those escaped prisoners captured with the least possible delay? If they could be taken now, Rodney and Dick and Ned would be taken with them; but I don't know whether I want that to happen or not. If it should get noised abroad that they were captured with my help, or through information furnished by me, I'd have everybody in the settlement down on me; and goodness knows I've got enemies enough already."

This was a matter requiring thought; and in order that he might have plenty of leisure to

devote to it, Captain Tom allowed his mule to walk every step of the five miles that lay between the plantation and Mooreville. He rode past Mr. Gray's house without stopping, and in due time drew rein in front of Kimberly's store, to find the usual number of lazy Home Guards loitering about there doing nothing. They were surprised to see him, for the news of his sudden and mysterious disappearance had been spread all through the settlement. His father, who had spent half the night riding about in search of him, pretended to believe that Tom had fallen in with the soldiers from Camp Pinckney and joined them in pursuit of the escaped Yankees; but there wasn't a man in the country who didn't laugh at the idea as soon as he heard of it. More than that, there wasn't a single member of the Home Guards who had made an earnest effort to trace the fugitives. The most of them paid no attention to Tom's order to turn out, and those who did, returned to their homes as soon as they learned that the Yankees were armed.

“Why, cap'n, where in the wide world did you drop from?” exclaimed Lieutenant Lam-

bert, as Tom Randolph rolled off his mule in front of the store. "Have you been after them Yanks? Your pap said you had."

Tom walked into the recruiting office and met Captain Roach, who began to tell him how his unexplained absence had frightened his mother; but the commander of the Home Guards interrupted him without ceremony.

"Before I tell you anything about myself," said he, turning to the eager Home Guards who had followed him into the office, "I want to know how many of you men would like to win fame, and perhaps promotion, by capturing the four Yankees who are roaming about the country, shooting our comrades down in cold blood."

"I would, for one," replied Lambert promptly.

"And me!" "And me!" "And here too!" chimed in the others; and they threw so much earnestness into their words, and seemed so impatient to learn how the feat could be accomplished, that a stranger would have thought they really meant to do something.

“I am glad to see you so patriotic,” said Captain Tom. “And the way for you to prove your words is to—you know where Ned Griffin lives now, don’t you? Well, go down there at once, and you will find the men you want at the foot of his lane.”

“How do you know that?” demanded Captain Roach.

“Because I left them there not more than—I mean when I escaped from them last night,” answered Tom, who, now that the danger was past, would not have sold his experience for any reasonable sum of money. “You don’t believe it, do you? Well, it is a fact that I have been a prisoner in the hands of those very men, and narrowly escaped being shot.”

“But how did you get away from them?” continued the enrolling officer.

“I knocked one of them down with the butt of his own musket and took to my heels; that’s the way I did it.”

This was going too far, and Captain Tom was quick to perceive it. Some of his men exchanged sly winks with each other, and turned

toward the door as if they had heard quite enough of such stories as that, while Captain Roach, who had put a little faith in Tom's tale at first, sat down in his chair and pulled some papers toward him.

"Continue to report regularly every day," said he, addressing himself to Lambert; "I have received no official notice that Camp Pinckney is ready to take conscripts, but all the same I know it is ready, and an order to send out a squad may come any hour."

"That's a polite way of calling me a liar," said Tom to himself. "I know where I can find those who will take some interest in what I have to say; and if I don't go there and drop a bomb into this camp that will scatter it far and wide, I'm a Dutchman."

He was too angry to say anything aloud. He looked hard at Captain Roach for a moment, and then went out to the hitching rack where he had left his mule, the Home Guards dividing right and left, and making no remark as he passed through their ranks. He went home with all the speed he could induce his long-eared beast to put forth, and the recep-

tion he met when he got there almost made amends for the deliberate slight that had been put upon him in the enrolling office; but the best part of the story he intended to tell was knocked in the head by the first words his mother said to him. He was going to describe a terrific battle he had had with the escaped prisoners somewhere in the woods; but his mother cried, as she ran down the steps and clasped him in her arms:

“O Tom! Where have you been? And how came your horse hitched out there in the grove?”

Captain Randolph had forgotten all about his horse, and just then he wished that one of the Yankees had put a bullet through the animal's head instead of tying him among the evergreens. Then he could have said that he did not surrender without a fight, and the dead horse would have proved it.

“Some of the neighbors heard him calling as they were riding along the road, and went in and brought him home; but they saw no signs of you,” continued Mrs. Randolph, looking hard at Tom as if to assure herself

that he was all there. "You don't know how frightened we all were. The first thing I thought of was those dreadful Yankees, and I was afraid you might have fallen into their hands."

"And that's just what happened to me," replied Tom. "I was a prisoner in less than an hour after I left you yesterday; but I made something of a fight before they took me. I think I know where my revolver is—I threw it into the bushes rather than give it up to the enemy."

"Oh, you reckless boy, how could you do it?" exclaimed his mother. "Come right in and go to bed."

"And when you see that revolver you will notice that there isn't a single cartridge left in it," added Captain Tom, as he followed his mother up the steps. "I threw away my sword, too, but think I can find it again. I didn't surrender, mind you. I was captured at the muzzle of four loaded muskets."

"You dear boy! And how did you get away from them?"

"I waited until they went to sleep last

night. Of course they left one of their number to guard me, but a Yankee is no match for a gentleman when it comes to a fight. I just knocked him down and cleared out."

"And wasn't you hurt a bit? Didn't they try to stop you?"

"Of course they tried to stop me, and the way the bullets flew was a caution; but the night was dark, the bushes thick, and I escaped without a scratch."

This was only the introduction to the long story Tom had to tell, and although there was scarcely a word of truth in it from beginning to end, his doting mother believed it all. His father looked slightly incredulous when Tom told how he had laid around in the woods for long hours while the Yankees were searching high and low to find him, for his boots and clothing did not bear out his thrilling narrative. They were dusty, of course, but not at all torn and mussed, as they ought to have been if the wearer had had such a time working his way out of the woods. But Mr. Randolph was so overjoyed to see Tom back safe and sound that he said nothing about it.

“Now, my son, you must quit the Home Guards at once and stay right here on the plantation,” said Mrs. Randolph, when she had asked her hero all the questions she could think of. “When you are a private citizen you will not be called upon to assist in capturing desperadoes.”

“I’ve done the very best I could for the South ever since I joined my fortunes with hers,” answered Captain Tom; “I have risked life and liberty in her defence more than once, and am ready to do it again; but I can’t fight the whole Yankee nation alone and unaided.”

“Certainly not,” assented his mother.

“I was the only one of the company who had the pluck to face those desperate men in the woods,” continued Tom, “and was captured for my pains. I ordered my men out to help me, but they never came. They left me to meet the danger alone; and when I dropped into the enrolling office on my way home, they were loafing as usual and bragging too. And when I told them right where they would find those Yanks, and tried to get them to go out and capture them, do you sup-

pose they would go? They just as good as told me that they did not believe me, and Roach broke in on my story by giving orders directly to Lambert instead of passing them to him through me. I have put up with that man just as long as I am going to; and, father, if you will pay Larkin off and let him go, I'll be ready to take his place to-morrow morning. And now I'll write to the Governor the very first thing I do."

This letter to the Governor, tendering his resignation as captain of State troops, was the "bomb" with which Tom had threatened to "scatter Captain Roach's camp far and wide," but when he sat down to write it, the thought occurred to him that if he said too much the letter might operate like a boomerang, and hurt him more than he hoped to hurt Captain Roach. If he had written it as he had it framed in his mind, it would have been a complete and scathing indictment of the enrolling officer's way of doing business; but the letter he showed his mother, when she came to his room in response to his call, read something like this:

I have the honor to tender herewith my resignation as captain of the State militia which was granted me on the —th day of April last, with authority to raise and command a company of mounted men for home defence.

I have long been of opinion that partisan organizations are not what we need in this hour of our country's peril, and now I am satisfied of it. Our best men long ago went to the front voluntarily, leaving behind them a rabble who cannot possibly be made into soldiers. The men under my command were selected with the greatest care, but I am obliged to say that they are fit for nothing but guard duty at Camp Pinckney. If they were ordered there in a body, to take the place of better men who could be sent to the front, it would be a relief to the community. For myself I have other ideas, which I shall proceed to carry out as soon as I receive notice that my resignation has been accepted.

“That is nothing but the truth,” said Mrs. Randolph, after she had read the letter. “But, Tom, I am afraid it will get you into trouble.”

“I don't see how,” was the reply. “You don't suppose that the Governor will bring it down here, show it to such fellows as Lambert and Moseley and the rest, and ask them what they think of it; do you? He has other fish to fry.”

“But suppose he should ask you what your other ideas are,” said his mother.

“There’s no danger of that. If the Governor thinks that my chief reason for resigning is because I want to go to the front, well and good. I am not to blame for what he thinks. I have other ideas, and that’s a fact ; and one of them is to see the men who winked and nudged one another to-day when I was trying to put a little courage into them, sent where they will be held with their noses close to the grindstone. Now I’ll ride down and mail this, and when the acceptance comes I’ll tell Roach what I have done.”

“That reminds me that the mail carrier had a race with a squad of Yankee cavalry yesterday,” said Mrs. Randolph.

“Great Scott!” exclaimed Tom. “Have they come as close as that to Mooreville? They are bound to get here sooner or later, but I hope they’ll stay away a week longer, for then I shall be a free man.”

And Captain Tom might have added that he would be glad to see the Federals at the end of a week, provided he received a favorable answer from the Governor in that time. When the Home Guards were ordered away

to do duty at Camp Pinckney he would consider his account with them settled ; and the other old scores—there were four of them now—could be attended to at some future time.

CHAPTER XIV.

RODNEY KEEPS HIS PROMISE.

WHEN Captain Randolph was done with his leave-taking he hastened away as if he feared that the escaped prisoners might change their minds and call him back. He was out of sight in an instant, and when he was out of hearing Rodney Gray said :

“ Now we must *git* ourselves. I don't know what sort of a story Tom will tell when he gets home, but it is safe to say that he will make himself out a very brave fellow, and urge his men to take up our trail at once.”

“ You needn't trouble yourself about the Home Guards,” said Ned.

“ I don't ; but if those same Home Guards should chance to stumble upon the soldiers from Camp Pinckney, we'd have something to trouble ourselves about, wouldn't we ? So I say we had better move away from here. Pick up that basket, somebody ; and Ned, you

take care of the quilts, for we'll not need them. We shall lie by during the day-time and travel at night. You haven't heard the last of this morning's work, Ned, and neither have I."

"If that Home Guard gets you into trouble after what you have done for him, find means to let the —th Michigan cavalry know it; and the first time we scout through here we'll pay our respects to him," said Ben hotly. "If it hadn't been for Griffin's mother, Captain Randolph would have gone to a Northern stockade as sure as he is a living man."

"I'll bear that in mind," replied Ned. "Good-by, boys. So-long, Yanks."

"May the best of good luck always attend you, Johnny," said the fugitives in concert.

This parting would have disgusted Captain Randolph if he had been there to witness it, and might have led him to say: "This is another insult that I've got to remember against the Griffin family," for there was a good deal of friendly feeling manifested on both sides. Surly Ben did not turn his back this time, but held fast to Ned with one hand,

while he pointed to the shoes he wore, with the other, and said :

“If I get away I shall have you to thank for it. I couldn't have walked a mile with my feet on the ground as they were when you took pity on me last night. If I can ever repay you I will.”

“You have repaid me a hundred times over by letting Rodney and Dick go free when you captured them a few days ago. So-long, Yanks.”

“Fall in,” said Rodney. “Good-by, Ned. I wish you would make it your business to tell mother that you saw us safely off.”

Ned began to roll up the quilts, the corporal shouldered the basket containing the provisions, and Rodney led the way deeper into the woods, the soldiers coming next in line and Dick Graham bringing up the rear ; and as he trudged along in silence he had much to say to himself. Was this Rodney Gray, who was risking so much to guide these ragged, foot-sore men to a place of safety, the same rabid Secessionist who once wanted to ride rough-shod over everybody who stood up for

the Union ; who had not scrupled to bring his own cousin into serious difficulty on account of his loyalty to the Old Flag ; who applauded so lustily when the *Mobile Register* said that Northern soldiers were small-change knaves and vagrants who were fit for nothing but to be whipped by niggers ; and who declared he would not pull off his gray suit until the South had gained her independence ? We said that fifteen months' experience in the army of the Confederacy, which never kept a single one of the promises it made to those who enlisted under its banner, had opened Rodney Gray's eyes ; and although he still believed in State Rights, he did not believe in fighting for a government that had deliberately gone to work to make conscripts of its volunteers. Nor did he longer believe that Northern men didn't know how to fight. The way they thrashed him and his comrades in Missouri proved that they did.

Dick Graham was like Marcy Gray, Rodney's cousin. He loved the Union and the flag that waved over it ; but, unlike Marcy, he thought it his duty to stand by his State.

When Van Dorn was whipped at Pea Ridge Dick Graham was willing to lay down his arms and give up the useless struggle ; but the government at Richmond wouldn't let him. It made conscripts of him and all the other State men who had enlisted under Governor Jackson's proclamation, and ordered them across the Mississippi to join the Army of the Centre under Beauregard. Dick went because he could not help himself, and did his duty faithfully while he remained ; but he had his discharge in his pocket now, and said there would have to be a marked change in his feelings before he would swear away his liberty again. There were many like him. He thought of all the men in his company and regiment with whom he had been on terms of intimacy, and could not name half a dozen who would have said a harsh word to Rodney Gray if they had known what he was doing at that moment. The most of them would have done the same thing and been glad of the chance.

Although Rodney exercised little or no caution in threading his way through the woods,

he insisted that there should be no talking among his followers. The slight rustling they made in the bushes might not attract attention, because there were so many cattle and hogs running at large in the timber; but the sound of a voice would betray them to anyone who might happen to be within hearing. Their progress was easy enough until they reached the place where the woods ended and the broad, cultivated fields began, and then Rodney announced that it was time for the fugitives to halt and get a little sleep if they could, while he and Dick went on ahead to see how things looked.

“From here on there is little cover except such as we shall find in blind ditches and behind bush-lined fences,” said he. “You boys take a bite and a nap, and Dick and I will go to that plantation house you see over there, and inquire about our friends from Camp Pinckney. I am somewhat anxious to know where they are. Don’t be in any haste to challenge or shoot when you hear us coming back.”

“I suppose you know the people who live

in that house," said Dick, as he and Rodney started off, after taking leave of the Federals. "What sort of a story are you going to tell them?"

"I am well acquainted with them," answered Rodney, "but whether or not their friendship for our family would lead them to do these Yanks a good turn, I can't say. I'll not trust them too far till I find out. We'll tell them the truth so far as our war record is concerned, but we're hog and critter hunting when they ask us what brought us into the woods. And of course we know all about the escaped prisoners."

Rodney did not lead the way directly toward the house, but worked his way along a fence until he reached a point from which the dwelling could not be seen; and then he and Dick climbed over into the field and struck out across it without making any further attempt at concealment. It never occurred to them that possibly the little clump of trees that hid the house might also hide something else from their view, but such proved to be the case; for as Rodney walked around the corner

of the building with all the confidence of a welcome visitor, he was surprised and frightened to find himself in the presence of the very men he came to inquire about—the soldiers from Camp Pinckney, who were sitting or lying at their ease under the shade of the trees, while the master of the house and his family moved among them with steaming coffee-pots and trays filled with something good to eat. Their hounds were lying close by on the grass, their horses stood at the front fence with their heads down as if asleep, and both looked as though they needed rest. The boys made a mental note of these things and walked straight ahead as if they belonged there, their approach being hailed with an exclamation of delight from the owner of the plantation, who was the first to catch sight of them.

“What do you mean, sir, by such conduct?” said Mr. Turnbull, passing his well loaded tray to one of the soldiers and hastening to meet Rodney with outstretched hand. “You’ve been at home five or six days, and this is the first glimpse we have had of you. Come up and have a bite.”

Rodney thanked him and presented his friend Dick, who was welcomed in the same breezy way. Then they shook hands with the other members of the family, and were made acquainted with the lieutenant who commanded the soldiers—the one whom Captain Randolph had met and talked with the day before. There was also a neighbor present who had come over to hear what the soldiers had to say about the escaped prisoners, and about Tom Randolph, whose mysterious disappearance was the talk of the planters for miles around. Rodney was not pleased to see Mr. Biglin, that was the neighbor's name, for he was a red-hot Secessionist, who denounced Mr. Gray for his moderate views, and declared that every man who retained a spark of love for the old Union ought to be shot on sight.

“Now I think we are all happy and comfortable,” said Mr. Turnbull, when the boys had been provided with plates and something to put on them. “And that's better provender, I take it, than you got in the army; eh, Rodney? How do you like army life anyway? And when are you going back?”

The lieutenant looked surprised, as Rodney and Dick knew he would, and so they handed over their discharges to prove that they had seen service, and had the right to be at home at that particular time.

“We’re not going to be in any hurry,” answered Rodney, who thought all his neighbors ought to know how he felt on that point. “Since I came home I have met many able-bodied civilians who were fierce for a fight when this thing first broke out, and who haven’t yet put on a gray jacket. When I see those men in the front rank I’ll go back, and not before.”

Mr. Biglin winced and glanced uneasily at the soldiers, for these remarks came pretty near applying to him, as Rodney meant they should. Mr. Turnbull was exempt by reason of his age, and he wasn’t a very hot Secessionist, either. His wife hastened to turn the conversation into another channel by saying:

“O Rodney; did you hear anything of those escaped prisoners in your neighborhood, and do you think they have killed or captured Tom Randolph?”

“Small loss,” began Mr. Turnbull, and then he was checked by a look from his wife. The latter knew that every word that he uttered against Tom would get to Mr. Randolph’s ears by the shortest route, and she was afraid of Home Guards.

“Randolph was down here last night looking for Tom,” continued Mr. Turnbull, “but he told a story that was too funny for me to believe. He said Tom had gone out with his Home Guards to search for the prisoners, but I know better than that.”

“And Tom certainly did not go into the woods alone to hunt for them, so what chance had the Yanks to kill or capture him?” added Rodney. “We know that they were in our neighborhood yesterday, for some of these soldiers told my mother so; but they never came near our house.”

“I noticed you did not come by the road,” observed the lieutenant. “Have you been riding through the woods back of this plantation?”

“Dick and I have been walking through them, but not a horn nor a hoof did we see,”

answered Rodney. "You know, Mr. Turnbull, that my father will have a big lot of bacon and beef to pay to the government for the exemption of two overseers; and just now I don't know where he is going to get it."

"Ned Griffin is one overseer," said Mr. Turnbull. "Who's the other?"

"I am. I never was a good fighter. I think I can do the Confederacy just as much service by working on a farm and raising grub for the soldiers, as I can by staying in the army. At any rate I am going to try it until some of my neighbors leave off fighting with their mouths and shoulder a musket."

"That's fair, I'm sure," said the lieutenant; while the soldiers winked and nodded at one another as if to say: "Our sentiments exactly." Mr. Biglin saw it and it nettled him, for he had done a great deal of fighting with his mouth, but every dollar he gave to aid the cause of the South was fairly squeezed out of him.

"And while you are working one of your father's farms, I suppose you will hold yourself in readiness to help any destitute Yankees

who may happen to come your way," said Mr. Biglin.

If Rodney and Dick had been the inexperienced boys they were when they first entered the army, these startling words would have knocked them out of their chairs. If Mr. Biglin didn't know what they had been doing that morning, his language and actions seemed to indicate that he suspected it. If that was the case, the information must have come from Tom Randolph. He had had plenty of time to reach home and spread the news far and wide. If Mr. Biglin had been content to stop right there he might have left a bad impression upon the minds of some of his auditors; but seeing that he had made Rodney and his friend uneasy, he went on to say :

"I heard a fishy story about your being captured by Yankee soldiers who were gentlemen enough to release you."

"There's nothing fishy about it," replied Rodney, greatly relieved. "I said that Dick and I were captured and set free again between here and Camp Pinckney, and it is nothing but the truth. I said, further, that if I ever saw

those men in trouble I would try my best to help them out ; and I appeal to these soldiers here to say if they wouldn't do the same."

"I would, if I could do it without bringing myself to the notice of my superiors," said the lieutenant ; while his men nodded at Rodney and one another as they had done before.

"Well, I wouldn't," declared Mr. Biglin, in savage tones. "And more than that, I would report every soldier or civilian whom I knew to be guilty of such a thing."

"I thank you for your words," said Rodney to himself. "I know now that you'll not do to tie to, and shall be careful that none of my doings get to your ears."

Mrs. Turnbull saw that it was time for her to interfere again. Two of her guests were becoming almost red in the face with anger, and her woman's wit or something else told her that the conversation was taking a dangerous turn. She had wondered from the first what brought Rodney Gray so far from home on foot, and now she believed that she knew all about it. She moved her chair to the side of Rodney's, and asked the young soldier to tell her a story

of army life ; and as she did so, her gaze wandered through the bushes and trees to the front fence, where she saw one of Mr. Biglin's negroes dodging about, and evidently trying to catch the eye of his master without attracting the attention of anyone else in the yard. The circumstance increased her suspicions, but she said very calmly :

“Your boy Bill is out there in the road, Mr. Biglin, and I think he wants to tell you something.”

“Then why don't he come in ?” replied the planter. “He has been down in the woods trying to locate a small drove of my hogs, and perhaps he has found them.”

“And perhaps he has found something else,” was what Rodney's eyes and Dick's said when they looked at each other ; and they could hardly conceal their agitation when they observed that Mrs. Turnbull was keeping her gaze fixed on their faces.

“You, Bill !” shouted the planter. “Come here.”

The negro came very reluctantly, and when he saw his master turn about in his chair and

look at him, he stopped and twisted his face into all sorts of shapes and rolled up the whites of his eyes, trying by every means in his power to make his master understand that he desired to say a word to him in private.

“Well, why don’t you speak?” demanded Mr. Biglin. “Did you find anything down there?”

“Sah? Oh, ye—yes, sah; I found sumfin,” replied the negro, in a tone so significant that Mr. Biglin would have been dull indeed if he had failed to understand him this time. With the remark that he had better be getting along toward home he arose and followed the boy, who promptly led the way toward the front gate.

“Peculiar man, that,” said the lieutenant, rising from his comfortable couch on the grass and stretching his arms. “He didn’t even bid us good-by. I reckon we’d best be getting along toward camp. Boots and saddles!”

“Are you going to give up looking for those Yankees?” inquired Mr. Turnbull, and from the bottom of his heart Rodney thanked him

for asking the question. He wanted to do it himself, but was afraid to speak.

“I reckon I might as well,” answered the officer, as his men got upon their feet, aroused the slumbering hounds by snapping their fingers at them, and hastened to obey the command. “I did think of taking in those woods on my way to Mooreville, but don’t suppose it would be of any use. If the Yanks were there you two would have been likely to see them, wouldn’t you?” he added, nodding at Rodney.

“I am quite sure we would,” was the reply ; but after all he was not so sure of it. The timber was thick ; and, unless accompanied by dogs, a whole regiment might have walked through it without seeing any signs of a fugitive who took the least pains to conceal himself.

“That’s what I thought,” continued the lieutenant, “and as my men and animals are somewhat worn with travel, I think I will give it up and go home. I would have captured those men yesterday if the Mooreville Home Guards had been worth their salt. I may

have something to say to my colonel about it."

While the lieutenant talked he shook hands with the planter and the two boys, lifted his cap to Mrs. Turnbull, and thanked her for the excellent dinner she had given his hungry men, and walked toward the place where he had hitched his horse, accompanied by their host. The latter's wife remained behind; and when she saw the officer swing himself into his saddle she made some slight apology to Dick, and motioned Rodney to follow her into the house.

"What's down there in the woods behind our plantation?" were the first words she said to him when they were alone.

"Why, Mrs. Turnbull," began Rodney, "how should I know? I assure you I am at a loss——"

"You know what I mean, Rodney Gray, and you can't deceive me," interrupted the lady with so much earnestness that Rodney saw it was useless to argue with her. "You never in your life before came to this house on foot; you were frightened when you found

the soldiers here ; you became angry the moment Mr. Biglin spoke of Yankees ; you were frightened again when the boy Bill intimated that he had a word to say to his master in private ; and all through— Aha ! You do know what I mean, don't you ? ”

“ Mrs. Turnbull,” replied Rodney in a husky voice. “ They are the men I promised to help if I could. You'll not betray them ? ”

“ I ought to scold you for speaking such words to me, and some day I will,” said the lady hastily. “ But just now I want to warn you against Mr. Biglin. I am sorry to say that he is not trustworthy.”

When she ceased speaking she stepped to the window and looked out. She stood there a moment and beckoned Rodney to her side. The Confederate soldiers had disappeared up the road in a cloud of dust, and Mr. Biglin was just riding by the house. It was plain that he was in a hurry, for he did not stop to pick up his hat, which flew off just as Rodney caught sight of him, but dug his heels into his mule's sides in the effort to make him go faster.

“He’s trying to overtake the soldiers!” gasped Rodney.

“He certainly is,” replied Mrs. Turnbull calmly. “He will succeed, too, and when he brings them back with the hounds——”

“The Yankees will burn him out before he is a week older,” said Rodney, through his clenched teeth.

“They will do nothing of the sort unless you bear witness against him, and I know you will not do that,” answered Mrs. Turnbull. “But waste no time in words. You know what to do.”

“I will say something in your favor and Mr. Turnbull’s as soon as I can gain the ear of the provost marshal,” said Rodney. “Good-by, and thank you for the interest you take in my Yankee friends.”

Rodney made a sign to Dick as he sprang down the steps and ran around the corner of the house, and told him his story as they sped across the field side by side. There was one thing in their favor, he said. Biglin’s mule was one of those critters that gallop up and down in one place instead of going ahead, and

if the Confederates were moving with any speed at all, he might not be able to overtake them until they had gone a mile or two toward Mooreville. But he would certainly come up with them sooner or later and bring them back ; and then——

“And then they’ll put the hounds on the Yanks’ trail *and ours*,” exclaimed Dick, finishing his sentence for him. “Rodney, you have got yourself into the worst kind of a scrape by helping those prisoners.”

“And how about yourself ?”

“I’m going to skip out and go over the river, you know ; but you’ve got to stay here and face the music. The lieutenant may not be able to set Tom Randolph’s cowardly Home Guards on to you—indeed, I don’t believe he will try ; but he’ll report the matter at Camp Pinckney, and that will be bad for you.”

The boys ran across the field at the top of their speed, and scaled the fence without hearing any sounds in the direction of the house to indicate that Mr. Biglin had returned with the soldiers. Ten minutes later they were

challenged in a low, peremptory tone that Dick said meant business.

“*Who* comes there?” said the corporal’s voice. “Speak quick.”

“It’s all right, Yank. I don’t wonder you look anxious,” replied Rodney, as he and Dick made their way through the bushes and found the fugitives standing erect with their guns in their hands. “Come on, now. There’s not a second to lose.”

“Do you know about that nigger?” inquired Ben. “Well, sir, he found us all asleep and was onto us before we knew it. We could have captured him easy enough; but we never looked for treachery among the darkeys, and besides we didn’t know but you Johnnies had sent him down with a message or something. But the minute we spoke and he ran, we knew there was mischief afoot. Of course we were afraid to shoot him, and so he got safely away. Did you see him? What did he say?”

“We didn’t hear what he said to his master,” began Dick. “But we——”

“You go to the rear and let me talk,” in-

errupted Rodney, who had forgotten to tell his friend that Mr. Biglin's name must not be mentioned in the hearing of the escaped prisoners. They would remember him, of course, and square accounts with him the first time their regiment was ordered out on a scout. He managed to tell some sort of a tale without speaking of Mr. Biglin, but it was not entirely satisfactory to the corporal.

“You're shielding somebody, Johnny; but if he is a friend of yours it's all right,” said the latter.

“What odds does it make to you so long as you get safe to the river?” answered Rodney. “I am shielding somebody, and I do it because Mrs. Turnbull expects me to. That's the name of the woman who lives in that house, and if it hadn't been for her there's no telling what would have happened. Bear that name in mind—Turnbull; and when you are raiding through here, don't steal so much as a drink of milk from that family.”

The corporal and his men promised, and said the name over several times to fix it in their memory.

“Our pursuers are all soldiers,” continued Rodney, “and under almost any other circumstances I believe they would let us off easy; but the way they’re fixed, they’ve got to do their duty or be reported. They are bound to come back to the house and put out the hounds——”

“And they’ve done it,” said Dick Graham, coming to a sudden standstill and turning one ear toward the house. “There! Do you hear it?”

All this while the fugitives had been making the best progress they could through the woods, but now they stopped and listened intently. Yes, they could hear it plainly enough; not a single bugle note like that which had attracted Dick Graham’s attention, but a whole chorus of eager yelps, proving that all the hounds had taken up the trail.

“This is going to be the tightest squeak we’ve had yet,” observed Ben. “How many of them are there in the party?”

“About six hounds, I should say, and twice as many men,” replied Rodney. “Enough

altogether to make running easier than fighting. Dick, take this bottle, and don't use it until I say the word."

"What's in it?" inquired the corporal.

"Turpentine; and if the dogs get a good sniff of it, it will spoil their scenting powers for quite a while. The trouble is it evaporates quickly, and Dick mustn't use it until the hounds are close to us."

Dick fell back to the rear and Rodney set off on a keen run, directing his course toward a little bayou which he knew he would find a mile or so in advance. But fast as they went, the hounds came on at a swifter pace, their sonorous yelps grew louder every minute, and presently the encouraging shouts of the soldiers mingled with them.

"Oh, don't I wish I had enlisted in the infantry," puffed Ben, who followed close at Rodney's heels. "Such a tramp as we have had wouldn't be anything to a foot soldier, but it's death on a cavalryman."

"The hounds are now following Dick's trail and mine across the field," said Rodney. "They'll come on faster when they pick up

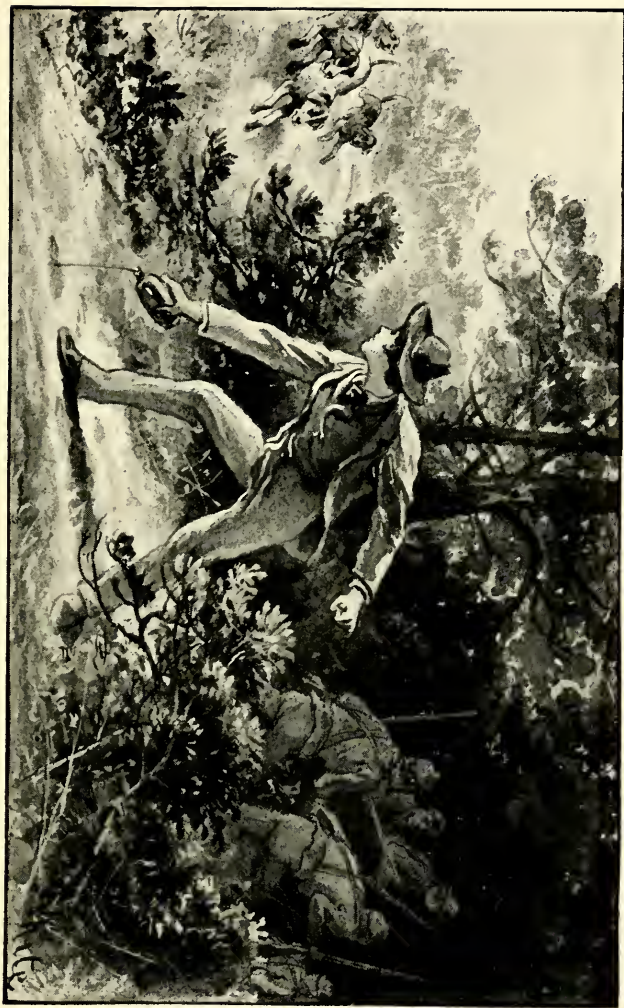
yours, for they will recognize it on the instant.”

And so it proved. The hounds gradually swept around from a point to the rear and left of them to another that was directly behind; and then their loud baying increased wonderfully in volume. They had at last found the trail that had been lost to them for so many hours, and were holding a jubilee over it. After that the horsemen were distanced, but the active hounds came on with undiminished speed, and in less than a quarter of an hour could be heard making their way through the bushes close behind. The prisoners began to wonder if it wasn't about time for Dick Graham to use the contents of his bottle, when their guide parted the thicket in front of him, and halted for an instant on the bank of the bayou for which he had been heading.

“Put half of it right here and the rest on the opposite bank. Forward, the rest of us,” said he; and with the words he dashed through the narrow stream and into the bushes on the other side.

Dick Graham showed no little nerve in car-

DICK BAFPLES THE BLOODHOUNDS.



rying out his instructions. When his companions disappeared he pulled the bottle of turpentine from his pocket, but knowing the volatile nature of the fluid he seemed to be in no haste to use it, until the leading hound was so close upon him that he could hear his labored breathing. Then he dug the heels of his shoes into the soft earth and filled the depressions with turpentine. Ten seconds later he stood on the other side of the bayou, filling other footprints with what was left in the bottle ; and just as the foremost of his fourfooted pursuers appeared in sight, he flung himself into the bushes. But he was not prepared for what followed. As fast as the hounds arrived upon the bank they smelt at the turpentine and backed away with a sneeze ; and when they were all in plain view, running about with their heads in the air or going through such contortions as dogs will when they unexpectedly encounter something disagreeable, a deafening roar rang through the woods, and every one of the hounds dropped in his tracks dead or wounded. The Union soldiers were not going to be tracked like beasts or criminals any longer.

CHAPTER XV.

RODNEY PASSES INSPECTION.

THIS was the first and last adventure that befell Rodney Gray and his party while they were on their way to Baton Rouge ; the shooting of the hounds "broke the backbone of the pursuit," as Dick Graham expressed it, although it did not put a stop to it altogether. The rebels raised a chorus of angry yells when they reached the bank of the bayou and discovered their fourfooted allies weltering in their blood, and fired their guns at random into the woods in the direction the fugitives had gone, but they made no energetic effort to continue the chase after that. And this went far to confirm Rodney in his belief that the lieutenant would not have put the hounds on the trail at all if it hadn't been for Mr. Biglin. By expressing this opinion aloud he could have made Mr. Biglin a beggar before another week passed over his head.

Contrary to his original plan Rodney kept his party moving until late that afternoon, when he halted the soldiers in the rear of another plantation while he and Dick went to the house to get something to eat, and make inquiries concerning their pursuers. This time they were not gone more than half an hour, and when they returned they were accompanied by the owner of the plantation, who cordially invited the soldiers into the house.

"It's all right, boys," Rodney assured them. "Our friends from Camp Pinckney haven't been this far down the road; Mr. Banks is Union, and a large squad of your cavalry has just gone back into the country, so that they are between us and the rebels."

"Why, Rodney," said Mr. Banks, "you're a rebel yourself."

"I was, and I don't know but I am yet; but I am not fighting any Yanks just now," was the smiling reply. "Come along, boys, and after we have eaten everything Mr. Banks has to spare, we'll take to the road and follow it as though we had a right there. We've done hiding now."

The corporal glanced at the military pass which Mr. Banks produced to prove that he was "all right" with the Federal authorities in Baton Rouge, and gladly accepted his invitation; and for fear that he might forget it, he drew one of those useless paroles from his pocket and wrote Mr. Banks' name and Mr. Turnbull's upon it.

"That's as strong a promise of protection as a non-commissioned officer can give," said he. "It will hold good with my regiment, any way."

The four prisoners splashed a good deal of water at the horse trough before they would consent to enter the house and sit down to the table like white folks, but when they got there they did ample justice to the substantial food that was placed before them. The planter apologized for the absence of salt on the table by saying that he hadn't been able to obtain a permit to bring it through the lines.

"Then smuggle it," suggested the corporal. "Buy a barrel of flour and chuck a bag of salt inside of it."

"But don't let your best friend see you do

it," chimed in Rodney. "That's the warning my father received. There are lots of traitors in the city who try to curry favor with the Yanks by carrying tales about their old neighbors. By the way, don't you want me to get you a barrel of flour?"

The expression of astonishment that came upon Mr. Banks' face set the table in a roar.

"You didn't expect me to speak so freely in the presence of these blue-coated boys, I suppose," continued Rodney. "You needn't be afraid, for they are not on duty now. Besides, they are soldiers, and I'd rather trust them than some civilians I know of."

"How will you bring the flour out?" asked Mr. Banks.

"I'll bring it out," answered Rodney confidently. "In the first place I'll ask for a pass for inland travel and a permit to trade, and I am bound to get both. I know where I can borrow a team in the city, and I intend to bring it out loaded. I know that salt and all munitions of war are contraband, and that there is an inspection of all persons and property going in or out of the lines; but I—

well, I shall be back this way to-morrow or next day, and if you want a bag of salt for your table you can have it."

"Well, I snum!" said the planter admiringly. "Your war experience has done a heap for you, Rodney."

"He had the reputation of being the best forager in the regiment," said Dick. "I've known him to stick a pig and clean him and bring him into camp under Daddy Price's nose, when the orders were strict that such things shouldn't be done. If there was anything to eat in the country our mess always lived well."

Dinner over, Rodney led his party out of the house and into the woods again; but it was done merely to mislead any talkative rebel or treacherous darkey who might be on the watch. It wouldn't do to let all the neighbors know that Mr. Banks had sheltered some escaped prisoners in his house during the night; but when darkness came they left the woods and found in one of the negro cabins beds that had been placed there on purpose for them, and on which they slept the sleep of the

weary. Daylight the next morning found them well on their way toward the city, with a breakfast under their belts and a big lunch in their pockets.

There was more travel on the road than Rodney expected to see, and the number of teams that were constantly going and coming gave him some idea of the amount of traffic carried on between the "invaders" and the country people. When he and his companions were halted by the first pickets a few miles outside the city, they told as much of their story as they thought necessary, and demanded to be taken before Colonel Baker, commanding the —th Michigan cavalry. In order to avoid delay and the trouble of answering the thousand and one questions propounded by the inexperienced non-commissioned officer who responded to the picket's call, the corporal, who did the talking, said that they were all escaped prisoners; but when they reached the place where the —th Michigan were encamped, and walked down the street toward the colonel's quarters, that story would no longer pass muster, for the

corporal was recognized by his comrades, who crowded about him from all sides. The news of that fight near Camp Pinckney had been brought in by a farmer, who affirmed that all the Yankees had been killed by the Home Guards as fast as they surrendered, and as a consequence the Michigan boys had given up all hope of seeing their friends again. Their commanding officer greeted them in the same cordial way, laughed over the paroles which the corporal gave him, took down the names of the Union people as they were read off, looked at Rodney's discharge and Dick's, and told the corporal to show them the way to the provost marshal's office.

"But, colonel, these boys, who have stood by us as though they belonged to us, want a pass and a permit to trade," said the corporal. "And if you will allow me to use your name, perhaps the provost will be more willing to grant the favor."

The permission was readily given, and the colonel's name must have had some weight with the marshal, for he did not detain Rodney and Dick at his office on business for more

than ten minutes ; but he kept them there talking in a friendly way for more than an hour. When he handed them the papers they wanted he took pains to say that there were some things that could not be taken through the lines under any circumstances whatever, and then he asked where they intended to make their headquarters when they were in the city, and whether or not they had any cotton to sell. As Rodney did not know what his object might be in asking this question, he answered it evasively.

“I wish I owned 1000 bales, and that it was in the Northern market at this minute,” said he. “It is worth sixty cents a pound up there.”

“Because if you’ve got any you may as well understand that it won’t do you much good,” said the marshal. “That is, unless you’re sharp. The Richmond government is going to buy or steal all the cotton in the Confederacy and make it the basis of a foreign loan.”

“And of course you Yanks are going to stop that sort of work by destroying every bale you can find,” said Rodney. “I understand

that, but I don't know what you mean by being sharp."

"You don't get the papers very often, do you?" said the captain. "Well, take those when you go. They're old, but perhaps their contents will be news to you. You will find that they say something about a 'partial trade' that is to be established between Northern men who are to have permits to trade inside our lines, and *Union* Southern people. Does that hit you? Anything to cripple the rebs, you know. And you will see something about the *Arkansas* ram in there, too. It was a brave act, if it was performed by the enemies of my country."

"What about her? What did she do?" inquired Rodney, who had heard vague reports that there was such a vessel as the *Arkansas*, and that great things were expected of her by her Confederate builders.

"Why, you know that the navy has been keeping up a regular bombardment of Vicksburg, don't you? I tell you the pluck of the Johnnies up there is something wonderful," said the captain, and Rodney and Dick, dis-

gusted as they were with the policy of the Richmond government, felt a thrill of pride as they listened to his words. "They think the lower river was given up too easily and are going to make a fight for their city; and when Farragut passed their batteries on the 28th of June, and our shells were falling like hail in the streets, parties of ladies were seen on the court house and in other conspicuous places, waving handkerchiefs and little rebel flags to encourage their husbands and brothers and sons, who were fighting the guns below them. Well, when Farragut joined Davis above the city they sent an expedition up the Yazoo to find this ram *Arkansas* and destroy her; but before they were fairly started they met the *Arkansas* coming down."

"And didn't they capture her?" exclaimed Dick.

"No, I am sorry to say. She either disabled or dodged the three gunboats composing the expedition, came out of the Yazoo with flying colors, ran through both fleets, and took shelter under the guns of Vicksburg. And she's there now in spite of two desperate attempts

that were made to destroy her. Sorry, aint you?"

"I can't honestly say that I am," answered Rodney, who had already made up his mind that the talkative provost marshal was willing to be friendly to any Confederate who had laid down his arms. "A brave act like that ought to be successful."

"Then our attempts to destroy her ought to have been successful, for they were equally brave," retorted the captain. "She got pretty well hammered while passing through the two fleets, and report says that as soon as she is repaired she is coming down to take Baton Rouge from us. But she is as far down as she will ever get. Farragut is here now with his whole fleet."

And this is a good place to say a word or two more about the situation at Baton Rouge, so that some events which we have yet to record may be made perfectly plain. On the 22d of the month (July) Flag-officer Davis made another attempt to destroy the *Arkansas*, but it resulted in failure. Two of his boats, the *Essex* and *Queen of the West*, were com-

manded to go down and sink her as she lay at her moorings under cover of the Confederate batteries, but her picked crew fought as bravely and skilfully now as they had done a week before. The *Essex* ran aground and remained there for ten minutes under fire so hot that it is a wonder she was not cut all to pieces; but she finally worked off and ran down to join Farragut, while the *Queen of the West* struggled back up the river to report the failure to Flag-officer Davis. The situation at this time was discouraging to our side. The gunboats were widely separated; the canal that was to make Vicksburg an inland town proved a failure; General Williams removed to Baton Rouge the small body of troops with which he had been co-operating with the naval forces; Commodore Davis went back to the mouth of the Yazoo and anchored there; and for full five months there was a lull in the operations against Vicksburg. But exciting things continued to happen in Rodney Gray's part of the country.

“To tell you the truth, we of the Army of the Centre always found more reliable in-

formation in your papers than we did in our own, and I suppose that these you have kindly given me will tell us all about the doings on the river," said Rodney, continuing the conversation we have broken off. "But I want to ask you one question before I go. My friend Dick wants to go to Little Rock. How is he going to get there?"

"I give it up," replied the captain.

"Do you think the commanding naval officer would permit him to cross the river if he showed his discharge!"

"He might, and then he might not. I can't say. Those navy men are fine fellows, the finest I think I ever saw; but they're so *very* particular that if I wanted to go to Little Rock, and if it was right that I should go, I wouldn't consult—I believe I should—well, I'd just go. That's all."

"Well, we will no longer trespass upon your time," said Rodney, getting upon his feet. "We are obliged to you for your kindness and courtesy, and if you ever come out our way, drop in and see us."

"I should be glad if I could accept half the

invitations that have been given me by people hereabout," replied the captain. "But just now I can't. Any rebs out your way?"

"I don't expect you to come without an escort. There are soldiers at Camp Pinckney, and some of them have been seen in Mooreville."

"Good-by, if you must go; and remember that there are a few things which that permit does not authorize you to take through the lines."

Rodney said he would not forget it, and then he and Dick saluted and went into the outer room, which was filled with civilians and soldiers awaiting an audience with the provost marshal. After looking in vain for the corporal, they concluded that he had returned to camp, so they took the nearest way to the home of Mr. Martin, the gentleman under whose hospitable roof Rodney and his father were sojourning on the night that Ned Griffin rode in from Mooreville with the information that Drummond and Tom Randolph were laying plans to have Rodney arrested when he reached St. Louis. Mr. Martin was glad to

see them, and made them feel at home at once. He laughed when they told him of their interview with the provost marshal, and, when Rodney declared that he'd like to see anybody treated with so much civility by an officer holding that position in Bragg's army, cautioned them to be careful how they trespassed upon the captain's good nature. The latter was cordial and friendly with everyone who had business with him, but he had a reputation as a fighter, had won all his promotions by his bravery on the field of battle, and had no mercy on civilians or soldiers who were caught disobeying his orders.

“But smuggling things out of the lines is like foraging in the army,” said Mr. Martin in conclusion. “The sin lies in being detected.”

“That's all I want to know,” said Rodney. “I've never been caught yet. You can tell me where I can borrow or hire a team, I suppose?”

Yes, the host could do that, and he might also be able to make a few suggestions that would be of use to them; but he didn't see

how Dick would get over the river unless he acted upon the provost marshal's advice and "just went."

"However," he said, after a moment's reflection, "I will introduce you to our mail carrier, if he will let me."

"Do we have a mail carried back and forth under the noses of these gunboats?" exclaimed Dick.

"I don't know how or where it goes, but we certainly have communication with the opposite shore. The service was very irregular while General Williams was at Vicksburg, but since he came back to Baton Rouge our mail reaches us at shorter intervals; so I imagine it is carried across at some point up the river and brought down through the country. I don't know, but I meet the mail carrier once in a while."

"And can you make it convenient to say a word to him about Dick?"

"I can and will; but I must tell you now that there is one thing that will operate against you. You told the provost marshal that you would make your headquarters at

my house as often as you came to town, and he knows me to be a Southern sympathizer."

"Whew!" whistled Rodney, while Dick looked frightened. "Mr. Martin, we will never come near your house again."

"Oh, yes, you will," replied their host. "But you must be careful how you act and who you talk to. The city is full of the meanest sort of converted rebels, who are harder on us than the Yankees. If Mrs. Martin goes out shopping or receives a guest oftener than once a week, they run to the marshal with the news, and I have the satisfaction of knowing that my premises are being watched for spies."

"They are a contemptible lot," declared Dick. "And if the provost marshal was the gentleman we took him for, he would not pay the least heed to their reports."

"All's fair in war," said the host. "These converted rebels are working for trade permits. There's going to be a lot of money made in cotton one of these days, and they want some of it. While in the city you may listen all you

please, but don't make a confidant of anybody but me. And don't have too much to say to those four escaped prisoners. You may run across them some time when they are on duty.'

Mr. Martin talked for half an hour in this strain, dropping hints here and there which proved to be of great service to Rodney, and then he conducted the boys to a clothing store and left them to make their purchases, while he went out to look for a team. Before they went to bed that night their business was all done, and all that remained for them to do in the morning was to load the two-horse wagon their host had provided for them and go home. Mr. Martin obtained from Rodney a list of needed goods, principally groceries, which he purchased and packed himself; and when the various boxes, barrels, and bags that comprised his load were afterward unpacked at his father's door, Rodney found in them many little articles which he was sure he had not placed on that list. They made an early start, and Rodney's parting injunction to Mr. Martin was to seek an interview with the mail

carrier at the earliest possible moment, for Dick was impatient to be on his way home.

“This is my first work as an overseer,” said Rodney, when the city was left behind and the two scraggy mules that pulled the wagon had been coaxed and thrashed into a snail’s trot, “and I think I have made a very fair beginning, seeing that the business is new to me. My next task will be to see you over the river.”

“I never knew you were an overseer,” said Dick.

“I’ve called myself one ever since I had that talk with my father on the night we came home,” answered Rodney. “And just see what I shall have to do when you are gone! I battled for fame and didn’t get it, and now I am going to work for dollars and see if I will have any better luck. Dick, I am just aching to make the acquaintance of one of those traders—that is, a Yankee trader. Not one of those converted rebels Mr. Martin told us of shall touch a bale of our cotton, if I have to fight to keep him away from it; but if some good Yankee comes along and offers sixty

cents a pound for it, you just wait and see how hard I will work to put it in his hands.”

It was plain that Rodney Gray belonged to the class who were denounced by Pollard, the Southern historian, as “unpatriotic planters.” In writing of this very matter Mr. Pollard said : “The country had taken a solemn resolution to burn the cotton in advance of the enemy ; but the conflagration of this staple became a rare event ; instead of being committed to the flames it was spirited away to Yankee markets. The planters of the extreme South, who prior to the war were loudest for secession, were known to buy every article of their consumption from the invading army. Nor were these operations always disguised. Some commercial houses in the Confederacy counted their gains by millions of dollars through the favor of the government in allowing them to export cotton at pleasure.” But Rodney Gray was a private individual, and he was well aware that if his father’s cotton brought the money it was really worth, it would take some good scheming on his part.

About an hour after the boys left the city they came upon the first picket post, which they found to be an unusually strong one, being composed of one sergeant, two corporals, and eight or nine privates. Rodney had just time to remark "We pass inspection here, probably," when one of the soldiers walked to the middle of the road, brought his musket to "arms port" and commanded them to halt. An instant afterward their wagon was surrounded by the rest of the pickets, who shook the barrels back and forth, dug their fingers into the bags, and bumped the boxes about in the most unceremonious style.

"Got a permit?" demanded the sergeant. "And a pass?" He did not ask who the boys were or where they came from, and the sequel proved that he knew without asking.

"These documents appear to be all right," he continued, after he had read the papers Rodney handed out. "Discharged rebels, eh? You don't seem to be such a desperate looking couple. What you got in your wagon?"

"Munitions of war," replied Rodney.

“There’s a six-pound field-piece in one of those barrels.”

“That’s what I thought. Get out, both of you.”

Although the boys were surprised and startled by this unexpected command they were prompt to obey it.

“Now let me see what you’ve got in your pockets,” said the sergeant. “Every scrap, mind you.”

“You’re welcome to read all the letters and things of that sort you can find about us,” answered Rodney. “We are not simple enough to lose our permits and passes by carrying despatches the first thing.”

“They’re the laddie-bucks who helped the —th Michigan’s boys,” observed a corporal.

“I know; but business is business,” said the sergeant. “And they’ve been in Martin’s company ever since they came to town.”

“That’s all right. I don’t object to your doing your duty, for I’ve been a soldier myself,” said Rodney. “But I do object to being taken for a plumb dunce. You’ll find

no writing about us except the papers we showed you and our discharges.”

But the sergeant obeyed orders, like the good soldier he was, and it was not until he had seen all their pockets turned inside out, and had felt of the seams of their coats and trousers, that he concluded they were all right and could pass on. He did not say a word about the things they had in the wagon. He was after despatches and nothing else.

“Climb in and go ahead, Johnny,” said the sergeant, giving Rodney a friendly slap to help him along. “And when you see that best girl of yours, give her my regards and say that I am coming out to call on her one of these days.”

“Well, be sure and come in a crowd. You’ll see fun if you don’t.”

“Any graybacks out your way?”

“Some; and the events of the last few hours will probably bring more. So-long, boys, and look out for the rebs in Vicksburg. They are coming down to clean you out.”

He was answered by shouts of laughter and

derision from the Federals, who advised him not to take a hand in the cleaning-out business, for he would be whipped if he did. He drove on, glad to escape so easily, and in due time turned up at Mr. Turnbull's house, where he and Dick rested the balance of the day and slept that night. When it was dark a barrel of flour was taken from the wagon and carried into Mrs. Turnbull's dining room; and when some of the flour had been taken out four bags of salt were brought to light. If those little bags had been filled with money Mr. Turnbull and his wife could scarcely have expressed more joy.

"We've been seasoning our food with the flour of the smoke-house for the last two months," said the former, "and I tell you I am glad to see some clean salt once more. You have made us your everlasting debtors. How much did it cost you?"

"I didn't get an itemized bill," replied Rodney. "Take it to pay for our grub and lodging."

The next night saw them safe at home, and the night following found them settled on Mr.

Gray's upper plantation, which was located a mile or two up the river from the one on which Ned Griffin was living as overseer. Rodney was elated over the result of his first visit to the city, for the immediate wants of the family had been abundantly supplied by that wagon-load of goods, and he and Dick could now wear clothes that looked as though they fitted somewhere; but his father and mother were not elated. They looked serious, and Rodney told Dick that he made a mistake when he described how carefully the Federal soldiers searched them for despatches.

“And it is a bad thing for you that they know we make our headquarters at Mr. Martin's,” he added. “They've got an eye on him; and what will you bet that they don't know he sees that mail carrier once in a while?”

“Then what's the reason they don't arrest him and the mail carrier too?” said Dick.

“They'll jump down on the pair of them when they are good and ready, and think they

can capture some important documents by doing it," answered Rodney. "You can't cross at Baton Rouge. You'll have to start from some point up the river. But we'll see the mail carrier if we can, and hear what he has to say about it."

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPTAIN RANDOLPH RECEIVES ORDERS.

RODNEY GRAY was an overseer now at all events, and being one of those uneasy fellows who must have something to occupy their minds at all times, and fond of hunting, he would have been as happy and contented as he wanted to be, if there had been no such things as Home Guards in the world. The Yankees at Baton Rouge he did not bother his head about. He had charge of 400 acres of land, 100 of which were under cultivation, and fifteen work hands—just enough to bring him under the exemption clause of the Conscription Act. For the privilege of staying at home and overseeing these hands the Confederate Government demanded of him 3000 pounds of salt pork and beef, or their equivalent in bacon, and Rodney expected to furnish the meat himself. There were many hogs running loose in the woods, and as the negro driver who had

charge of the plantation previous to Rodney's coming had taken no pains to "tame" them by feeding them regularly, they were as wild as deer, and Rodney intended to hunt them as he would have hunted deer—"with rifle and with hounds."

The "great house" in which Rodney lived was very unlike the same dwelling on the home plantation. It was built of unhewn logs and contained two rooms, the wide hall between them being used as the dining room, both summer and winter. The kitchen, which stood a little distance away, was built of logs, and so were the negro cabins, corn-cribs, smoke houses, and the little stable in which his riding horse would find shelter in stormy weather; but taken as it stood the plantation was a valuable one, for, concealed somewhere in the dark recesses of the woods, that hemmed the cultivated fields in on all sides, were several hundred bales of cotton that was worth sixty cents a pound in Northern markets.

The driver had been so careless with his work and so lax with the hands that Rodney found plenty of things demanding his atten-

tion, but he could not think of settling down to business so long as Dick remained with him. When they parted it might be forever, and Rodney was reluctant to let him go. Mr. Martin told them that they need not come to the city under a week expecting to hear any news from the mail carrier, but they did not wait as long as that without hearing news from another source, and of the most exciting character too. On the morning of the third day after their arrival at the plantation, Dick looked over Rodney's shoulder as they sat at the breakfast table in the wide hall, and saw half a dozen armed men ride up to the bars. They stood there a minute or two looking up and down the road, and then three of them dismounted and came into the yard. At the same instant another similar squad came in sight and also rode up and stopped at the bars.

“Rebs for a dollar,” whispered Dick.

“And not Home Guards, either,” replied Rodney, as the two arose from the table and walked out to meet the visitors. “They are strangers.”

“Well,” said the foremost, who might have

been an officer, though there was nothing on his coat to show it, "how does it come that a couple of likely lads like yourselves are here in citizen's clothes while everybody else is in the army?"

"Been there and came home to take a little rest," answered Rodney, feeling in his pocket for his discharge. "But everybody else isn't in the army by a long shot, as you would know if you belonged in this country. Read that, and tell me if you are out conscripting."

"We're out for more serious business than that," replied the soldier, reading the discharges one after the other, and handing them back to their owners. "Any Yanks about here?"

"None nearer than Baton Rouge that we know of."

"How large an army have they got there?"

The boys were obliged to say they couldn't tell; but they knew that General Williams had come down from Vicksburg with his whole force.

"We know that, too, and are following him up to lick him."

We don't know how to give an idea, in words, of the exclamation that broke from Dick Graham's lips when he heard this. It was the famous "rebel yell," long, loud, and piercing; and when the soldiers at the bars heard it they turned in their saddles and lifted their hats, and needed no other evidence to prove that Dick was or had been one of themselves. Then Dick demanded if there was going to be a fight right there in his friend's door-yard.

"It'll happen somewhere about here," replied the soldier. "Better find guns, you two, and join in. It's bound to be a victory for our side and you want to share in the honor. We're going to have the *Arkansas* to help us, and she is a match for all the vessels the Yanks have in the river. She proved it by what she did up at Yazoo."

After a little more conversation the boys learned that their visitor belonged to Breckenridge's division, which had been detached from the force at Vicksburg as soon as General Williams withdrew and Farragut started down the river, and they were simply scouting in

advance of the main body, which was to be reinforced by all the conscripts and regular troops at Camp Pinckney.

“If you want help, why don’t you bring into your ranks all the Home Guards around here?” said Rodney.

“Are there Home Guards about here? I am glad to know it, for we need all the help we can raise. Who’s their captain and where are his headquarters?”

Rodney gave the desired information, adding that if his visitor did not think it safe to venture as far as Mooreville with the small force at his command, he and Dick would volunteer to take a message to Captain Randolph. “But you will have to put it in writing,” said he, “for Tom will not believe us. And you must caution him against letting his men know that there is going to be a fight; for if they find that out they’ll scatter like rats in a pantry.”

“Like Home Guards everywhere,” replied the soldier in disgust. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said he, after thinking a moment. “I’ll get a line from the colonel commanding

our advance ordering Captain Randolph to hold his company in readiness to march at a moment's notice, and I'll either bring or send it here to-night if you will deliver it. Of course you'll not say anything to him or anybody else that will get to the enemy's ears."

"Oh, you needn't think to surprise the Yanks," exclaimed Dick. "They have had notice already that you are coming. But we'll get Tom out if we can."

The soldier asked a few more questions that the boys could not answer satisfactorily touching the length, shape, and strength of the Federal lines at Baton Rouge, and then joined his men, who moved down the road toward Mooreville.

"Did you forget Captain Roach and his conscripts?" asked Dick, when they were out of sight.

"I left them out on purpose," said Rodney. "But of course I shall speak to Roach about it when we take that note to Tom Randolph. His conscripts are all my near neighbors, and mostly Union men, who wouldn't be of the least use in a fight; and, Dick," here Rodney

sunk his voice to a whisper, "if I can do it without risk to myself, I shall go out of my way to warn them of what's coming."

"Oh, you traitor!" cried Dick.

"You would do the same if you were in my fix. Of course there are some I would not dare speak to, for they would tell where they got the information; but those I can trust to keep a still tongue in their heads will be warned, if I can find them."

The boys went back to their unfinished breakfast and ate heartily, as they had often done while men all around them were forming in line of battle and shells were bursting over their heads. But still Rodney was anxious, for the coming contest might bring great loss to his father. There were many bales of cotton concealed within a circle of a few miles of the place where he was sitting; both sides had proclaimed it contraband of war, and it seemed impossible that a line of battle could go far in any direction without discovering some of it; and the destruction of part would lead to the destruction of the whole, for some of those who lost, Mr. Randolph for instance,

would be mean enough to point out the hiding-place of the rest. This reflection troubled Rodney, but before he sat down to another meal he had something besides cotton to think about. The scouts of the opposing armies came together down the road, out of sight, but within plain hearing of the two boys, who ran to the bars and listened to the sounds of the conflict. They heard the sharp, quick reports of the carbines, and the cheers and yells of the combatants; and when the yells became fainter and at last died away altogether, and the cheers grew in volume until they became one continuous cheer, they looked at each other with the same startling question in their eyes.

“That’s the first encounter, and we’re whipped,” said Dick. “Now if the victorious Yanks come back this way—then what?”

“Our discharges and passes and permits will be of no more use than so much blank paper,” answered Rodney. “They’ll say that if we haven’t given information of some sort to the enemy already, we will do it the first

chance we get, and so we'd better trot right along with them to Baton Rouge."

"That's what I am afraid of. I don't want to go to Baton Rouge."

"Neither do I; and so I am going to do as other and better men have done under similar circumstances."

"Afoot or on horseback?" inquired Dick, who knew that his friend had resolved to take to the woods.

"On horseback, to save our animals from being stolen, and to give color to the story that we have gone to town," replied Rodney. "Come on, for there's no telling how soon the Yanks may come down the road at a gallop."

While one started for the stable yard, the other ran in to tell his black housekeeper that he was going to ride toward Mooreville, where he would remain until the Federals had left the country. Yes, there had been a sharp skirmish down there in the woods, he said in reply to the woman's anxious inquiries, the Confederates had been driven from the field, and he and Dick thought it best to get out of sight for awhile.

“The Federals may not come back this way,” added Rodney, “but if they do, tell the truth and don’t try to pass me off for a Union man. They know as well as you do that I have served my time in the Confederate army, and there’s nothing to gain by telling a different story. If anyone asks for me, you can say that I have ridden toward Mooreville.”

Well, he and Dick did ride toward Mooreville, but they did not go there. Not knowing how far the darkeys could be trusted, they went down the road half a mile or so, and turning into the woods hitched their horses close together so that they would not call to each other, and finally took up a position from which they could see the house and anybody who approached it. These precautions were not taken any too soon, for the Federals did scout back that way, and when they came in sight they were riding at top speed. They knew that a large party of horsemen had passed along the road before them, for they saw the prints of many hoofs in the dust. Some of them kept on without drawing rein, while others went into the house and all

over it ; but as no contraband goods rewarded their search they left it standing when they went away. And although the hands all left their work in the field and ran to the dwelling when they saw the blue-coats surrounding it, they did not improve the opportunity to secure their freedom, as the boys thought they would. They returned to their work when the soldiers departed, and Rodney and Dick thought it safe to go back to the house.

Their next visitor was a single Confederate soldier, who arrived just at dusk with a note addressed to "Captain Thomas Randolph, C. S. A., Commdg. Mooreville Troops." This man Rodney took into the house and fed as if he had been a long-lost brother, for he was anxious to learn something about the battle that was soon to take place ; but, although the messenger said he was orderly at headquarters, he could or would give very little information. Breckenridge was rapidly feeling his way toward the city, he said ; he would soon be reinforced by the command of General Ruggles, which would be picked up at Camp Pinckney, and with the *Arkansas* to help

and clean the Yankee gunboats out of the river, there was no doubt but that a decisive victory awaited him ; and having finished his supper, and said all he had to say, the messenger mounted his horse and rode off. Five minutes later Rodney and Dick had mounted theirs and were riding hard to carry that note to Captain Randolph. They stopped at Rodney's home just long enough to put the folks on nettles with the very meagre information they had to give, and a quarter of an hour afterward were sitting in Mrs. Randolph's parlor, waiting for Tom to show himself. When he came he was accompanied by his mother.

“Hallo, boys!” exclaimed Tom, with great apparent cordiality, while Mrs. Randolph shook hands with them one after the other. “You don't know how I have longed to see you both in order to——”

“That's all right,” interposed Rodney, who knew there wasn't a word of truth in what Tom had set out to say. “But if you will excuse me—here is an order that I was requested to place in your hands.”

“Who’s got any right to order me around?” exclaimed Tom, taking the note and fixing his gaze upon the writing on the outside. “‘Captain Thomas Randolph, C. S. A.,’” he read aloud. “Somebody has made a big mistake, for I don’t belong to the army of the Confederate States, and never did. What’s in it?”

“I don’t know,” answered Rodney; while Mrs. Randolph suggested that it might be a good plan for him to open it and find out. Tom did so with evident reluctance, and before he had fairly had time to make himself master of its contents, he turned as white as a sheet and fell heavily into the nearest chair.

“Oh, my dear boy! What is the matter? What could have disturbed you so?” cried his mother, who was really alarmed.

“I’ll not obey it!” shouted Captain Tom, as soon as he could speak. “Who is this Colonel Clark, who takes it upon himself to command me to hold my company ready to move at a moment’s notice, and what does he want of the company anyhow?”

“No doubt he wants you to help——” began Rodney.

“But how does he know that there is such a fellow as I am in the world, and that I command a company of State troops?” continued Tom, who was almost beside himself with terror. Acting on his own responsibility and serving under the eye of a Confederate officer were two widely different things. His mother took the note from his hand and read it, and she, too, became visibly affected.

“What can be the meaning of it?” she asked of Rodney.

“It means that there is going to be a battle somewhere in this vicinity, and that Tom must bring his men out to help,” was the reply. Rodney had predicted just such a scene as this and was prepared to enjoy it.

“A battle?” gasped Mrs. Randolph.

“Somewhere in this vicinity!” echoed Tom.

“That’s what they tell me, and indeed there has been a skirmish already. Breckenridge is coming here to drive the Yankees

out of Baton Rouge, and the *Arkansas* is coming to assist him."

Tom and his mother were too amazed to speak. They stared stupidly at the bearer of these evil tidings, and listened in a dazed sort of way while he told what he had heard and seen since morning. There was one thing Tom and his mother could not understand, and that was how Colonel Clark, whoever he might be, knew there was a company of Home Guards at Mooreville and that Tom was commander of them. But of course Rodney did not enlighten them on that point.

"You enlisted for just such work as this," said he.

"No, I didn't!" shouted Tom. "And what's more, I won't go. I'm as close to the Yankees as I want to be, and besides I don't belong to the service any longer. I've resigned."

This was news to the boys, who could scarcely refrain from showing how surprised they were to hear it. They were disappointed as well, for if Tom told the truth they would lose the fun of hearing how he took to the bushes to escape duty.

“Of course if your resignation has been accepted by the Governor,” said Rodney, “why, then——”

“It hasn’t been accepted yet,” replied Tom, speaking before he thought. “I only sent it to-day.”

“Then you are still in the service and can be held to duty,” said Dick; and Captain Tom and his mother both heard the sigh of satisfaction that escaped him as he uttered the words. “I have known men to go into action and be killed after their term of service expired.”

“But I won’t do it, I bet you,” whined Tom, with tears in his eyes. “Do you think it will be a very hard fight?”

“It can’t help it; it’s bound to be, and you’ll see more dead and wounded men lying around than you—— Gracious! I’m glad they can’t call on you and me, Dick.”

“Why, won’t you have to go?” faltered Mrs. Randolph.

“No, ma’am. We showed our discharges to-day, and they never said a word about ordering us out. They can’t, for we have served our time.”

This was the heaviest blow yet, and Captain Tom came so near wilting under it that Rodney's heart smote him and he determined to take his leave. So he got upon his feet, and Dick followed his example.

"What will they do to Tom if he fails to obey this order?" asked Mrs. Randolph, who, in all the trying ordeals through which she had passed on her cowardly son's account, had never before been so badly frightened.

"I couldn't obey it if I wanted to," cried Tom. "My men are scattered for miles through the country, and I couldn't spend the night in hunting them up."

"They may call it disobedience of orders if you don't do it," replied Rodney, who wanted to laugh. "If I were in your place I would make the effort."

"And run the risk of being shot? But suppose my men refuse to turn out?" said Tom, a bright idea coming into his mind.

"Then you will be blameless, and all you have to do will be to report to the colonel and tell him that you are ready for any duty he may assign you."

“And can't I stay at home any way I can fix it?” inquired Tom, who made no effort to conceal his terror.

“I wouldn't. What if some of the colonel's troopers should find you skulking here when you ought to be in the front rank? Or suppose the battle should be fought on your plantation. Wouldn't you——”

“Baton Rouge is not on our plantation.”

“I know, but a battle sometimes ends a good many miles from where it begins, and the one that's coming is as likely to be fought here as anywhere else. And if that should happen, wouldn't you rather have a musket in your hands than go skulking through the bushes trying to keep out of danger? I would a hundred times over. But really we must be going. Good-night.”

Rodney and his companion bowed themselves to the door and went out, and Captain Tom and his mother sat in their chairs looking at each other and listening to the clatter of the receding hoofs. When it died away altogether Tom jumped to his feet in great excitement.

“We never once thought to ask them where they got that order, or why it was sent by their hands instead of by the hands of one of that colonel’s own men,” he fairly sputtered. “Mother, it’s an infamous trick, and there isn’t going to be any fight. I’ll remember Rodney Gray for this and other things he has done to me—you see if I don’t!”

“I hope you are duly ashamed of yourself for frightening that poor woman so terribly,” said Dick, as he and Rodney galloped out of the yard and turned their horses toward the village.

“Why didn’t she stay out of the room?” retorted Rodney. “We sent in word that we desired to see Captain Tom privately, but she didn’t take the hint. So Tom thought he couldn’t spend the night in riding about the country. Well, we’ve got to, if we do the work we set out to do.”

The first part of that work was to call upon Captain Roach, who had excited Tom Randolph’s ire by accepting Rodney’s invitation to dinner, and the next to warn some of the Union men whom he had conscripted. The

former was overwhelmed with surprise and didn't know what to do, not being a veteran ; but he wasn't a coward, if he did turn white. He talked the matter over very calmly with his visitors, and following their advice said he would drop the conscript business until the battle had been decided one way or the other. And then he looked helplessly at Rodney as if to ask what he should do next.

“You ought to do duty or shed that uniform,” said the boy bluntly. “You can't assemble your conscripts now, and if you could, where would you find men to guard them to Camp Pinckney ? You can only show your good-will by reporting at the camp ; and if I were in your place, I think I should start the first thing in the morning. If you delay, you will be liable to be cut off by Federal scouting parties. Have you seen any Yanks about here to-day ?”

Captain Roach replied that he hadn't seen or heard of any, and Rodney went on to tell about the skirmish that had taken place near his plantation, and how he and Dick had taken to the woods and escaped being caught

in the house. The Federals couldn't prove anything against them, he said, but they could shut them up in Baton Rouge until Breckenridge captured it or was driven back where he came from, and that was something he didn't want them to do. Then he and Dick shook hands with the enrolling officer, wished him good luck, and went out into the night to finish their work. It kept them busy until daylight, and then they went to Mr. Gray's to breakfast, happy in the knowledge that they had done as they would be done by, and not one who wished them harm was the wiser for it.

Tom Randolph was hardly out of bed the next morning before he was made aware that there was some truth in Rodney Gray's story. A squad of Federal cavalry went by the house on a keen jump, and about an hour behind them a larger squad of Confederates went past at the same rapid gait. Tom wasn't soldier enough to know that these were nothing but scouts, and in his ignorance supposed that the battle had been fought while he was asleep, and that the Confederates had driven

their antagonists ; but it was not long before he discovered that the worst was yet to come. All that day soldiers in gray uniforms were in sight somewhere. They streamed by the house or came into the yard and gathered about the well, and an officer with high top-boots and a fierce mustache stood on the front gallery and issued orders in a voice that sounded as loud as a fog-horn. They trampled down the flower beds, cleared the cellar of everything eatable, and helped themselves to what there was in the kitchen, and through it all, the captain of the Home Guards never showed himself. Some of the time he was in the garret, oftener he was under the bed in his mother's room, and then again his frightened eyes were peeping through the carefully closed blinds. He had never dreamed that there were so many men in an army, and yet he saw but one column of a very small army, for Breckenridge made his assault with less than 4000 men. To his immense relief no one asked for him, and perhaps the reason was because Colonel Clark, who wrote that order, was with the other column, five or six miles away.

The attack on Baton Rouge was made the next morning at daylight, and although Rodney and Dick heard little of it and saw less, they had some hospital work on their hands. The heat was intense, and everywhere along the line of march men fell exhausted out of the ranks, and were taken in and cared for by the planters. Rodney's house and door-yard were filled with soldiers who could not go any farther toward the enemy, although they recovered their strength and power of action very suddenly when it became known that there was a possibility of the enemy's cavalry coming toward them: The attack, which was so successful at first that the Federal camps were captured or burned, failed utterly in the end, and at noon the fight was over and the Confederates were in full retreat. The *Arkansas* did not come down to help with her big guns, and if she had she might have met a warmer reception than she bargained for, for there were five gunboats in the river, including the iron-clad *Essex*. These took an earnest part in the fight while waiting for the *Arkansas*, their fire being directed by an army sig-

nal officer who stood on the roof of the capitol building. The Confederates were so badly whipped that they left seventy men on the field for the Union forces to bury.

The closing scene of the fight was enacted the next morning. The *Essex* went up the river six miles, found the terrible *Arkansas*, with her ten heavy guns and 180 picked men, hard and fast aground, and pounded her so severely that in fifteen minutes she was set on fire and abandoned. She blew up when the fire reached her magazine, but she left others behind which made themselves known and feared before the war was over.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

THIS short visit of the Confederate army was like a plague of locusts ; everything in the shape of eatables in and around Mooreville that they could place their hands on disappeared and was never heard of afterward. Some articles of value disappeared likewise, as was to have been expected ; but not very many, for the settlers had learned that it was best to be careful of such things during war times. No one had seen a Home Guard during those two troublous days, nobody could tell where Captain Randolph had kept himself or how he had behaved, and neither was there any news to be had of Captain Roach.

Our two friends drew a long breath of relief when " the fuss " was over, congratulated themselves on having escaped both duty and suspicion, and waited with what patience they could for the excitement to pass away so that

it would be safe for them to go into the city. But that time seemed long in coming. Inquisitive Federal scouts, who asked troublesome questions and insisted on knowing all about everything, came to the house every day, and on three occasions wounded Confederate stragglers appealed to their pity and begged assistance. Nor were these appeals made in vain, though the boys took great risks in concealing their Confederate friends during the day and helping them on their road at night. They deceived their neighbors, hoodwinked the darkeys they were afraid to trust, and told gauzy stories to Federal scouts until Dick affirmed that deceiving and lying would become a confirmed habit with them. But fortunately the necessity for these things passed away before that happened. The country was cleared of stragglers after a while, the settlement quieted down, and Rodney and Dick were ready for the next thing on the programme.

“I don’t know when I have had so hard a task set before me,” said Rodney, “and I would be glad to put it off forever if I could.

But since the parting must come, it might as well be one time as another. Shall we start for the city to-morrow morning?"

Dick answered with a decided affirmative, and the start was made. Believing that he ought to be ready to act as soon as the opportunity was presented, he took leave of Rodney's father and mother as though he never expected to see them again, and Rodney drew on the family purse for a good many gold pieces. If Dick succeeded in getting across the river he would still have a long journey before him—longer than the one Rodney made from Cedar Bluff landing to Price's army—and he would need a horse to ride, a coat and blanket to cover him when he camped at night, and money to purchase his supplies; and his friend's forethought provided for all these necessary things.

On their way to Baton Rouge they passed over the ground on which the right wing of the Confederate force formed in line of battle previous to the assault. It was just beyond Mr. Turnbull's house; and that gentleman's wife, after giving a glowing description of the

gallant way in which the Confederates advanced to the attack, told the boys in a confidential whisper that she had aided two Yankees who were captured and managed to escape during the fight; that there was a wounded rebel in one of the upper rooms of her house at that moment; that he was going to remain there until he was able to travel; and that one of the escaped prisoners whom Rodney befriended had smuggled medicine through the lines for him at her request, thus proving that there was such a thing as gratitude in the world. Before the boys left the house, they visited the wounded rebel in his room, and he told them that the fight was the most savagely contested of any he had ever been in, and, for the number of men engaged, the bloodiest. Some of the Indiana and Michigan boys fought with rails which they snatched from the fences, and the Yank who smuggled the medicine out for him said he had counted thirteen dead rebs in one heap.

“It was bad for our side,” moaned the wounded soldier, “and even if the *Arkansas* had been there to help us I don’t suppose we

would have made any better showing. The Yanks had things fixed for us, and now I've got to hobble through the world on one leg."

Although some stray missiles from the Confederate side found their way into the streets of the city, the boys did not find there as many signs of the conflict as they expected to see. Mr. Martin's buildings escaped unscathed, but Mr. Martin himself had been placed in arrest to prevent him from holding any communication with the enemy.

"As if I ever dreamed of doing such a foolish thing!" said he contemptuously. "Why, I want to live here; and consequently I do nothing that I consider to be risky. But I have seen the mail carrier, and he is going to pick up some bags this very night."

"Pick them up!" repeated Rodney. "Where are they?"

"Out in the country somewhere, and he is out there too, or will be at eight o'clock; and if your friend wants to go, now's his chance."

"Mr. Martin, I hope your kind efforts in my behalf will not bring you into trouble with the

Yanks," said Dick. "I feel very grateful to you."

But he didn't look so, and neither did Rodney. The time when they must part was close at hand.

"I don't want to hurry you away," continued Mr. Martin, "but as it will take some little time to ride to the place to which I shall direct you, you had better have your horses out of the stable at five o'clock, so as to pass the pickets before dark. I will give you a letter that will make you all right with Henderson."

The rest of the day, to quote from Dick Graham, flew away as if the hours had been greased. Half-past four came before they knew it, and with it the letter their host had promised them, accompanied by some instructions which they must closely follow in order to find and obtain an interview with Henderson. He was a cross, crabbed old fellow, Mr. Martin said, but the boys mustn't mind that. They would be cross and suspicious too, if they had been bothered and balked in their business as Henderson had been followed and

harassed in his. They must try and get on the right side of him, for he could take Dick to the other side if anybody could. Mr. Martin excused himself for not accompanying them to the stable where they left their horses by saying that to be seen walking the streets with a suspected man would bring suspicion upon them, and that was one thing they wanted to avoid.

The boys left the city and the pickets behind in good season, and took pains to make some noise as they galloped past the houses of three "converted rebels" who, so Mr. Martin said, were always watching and scheming for a chance to report somebody. They rode as if they were going home; but when darkness came they doubled upon their trail, passed these same houses again in silence, and turned into a lane that took them miles up the river to the hiding-place of Henderson, the mail carrier. They found it to be a pretentious plantation house situated in plain view of the river, and not at all such a spot as they would have chosen had they been engaged in Henderson's business. It would have been impossible

to surprise the mail carrier in his hiding-place, however, as they found when they approached nearer to it, for they had barely time to shout out the customary "Hallo, the house! Don't let your dogs bite!" before their horses were surrounded by a pack of belligerent canines, whose angry yelping completely drowned the voice of the master of the house.

"Get out!" he shouted, as soon as he could make himself heard above the tumult. "Who is it, and what's wanted?"

"Friends from the city," replied Rodney, who had been told just what to say. "I have a communication for Mr. Henderson from our mutual friend Mr. Martin. Will you look at it?"

The planter came down to the gate, took the letter from Rodney's hand, looking sharply at him and Dick as he did so, and carried it into the house with him. He did not ask them to "alight and hitch," and that proved that there was something or somebody in the house he did not want the boys to see. It was all of ten minutes before he came out again, and he brought with him a companion

who straightway made himself known by saying, in a complaining voice :

“I told Martin I couldn't do the like, and here he's gone and sent you, just as if I had agreed to do it. Which one of you is the fool?”

“I am the one who wants to go over the river, if you will be kind enough to let me have a seat in your boat,” replied Dick.

“Who said anything about a boat?” demanded Mr. Henderson, for the boys were sure it was he. “Do you want to be captured by the gunboats, and sent up for a spy or something? I don't expect to get back alive, or get across, either. But then! Martin's a friend of mine and keeps me posted in some things I—— Get off, both of you. Hitch your horses somewhere and wait till I come.”

“Dick, you're as good as off at last,” whispered Rodney, as the two men turned about and went back to the house. “Think of me riding all the way to Mr. Turnbull's alone in the dark while you are running the risk of being overhauled by the naval picket boats.

Have you got your money and discharge all right? Write to me if you see the ghost of a chance for a letter to get through, for I shall be anxious to hear from my old Barrington chum."

The boys had plenty to say to each other and an abundance of time to say it in, for a whole hour passed before the mail carrier again came out. This time he had two men with him—the planter and another passenger, the latter being muffled up to the eyes so that no one could have seen his face if it had been broad daylight. He said not a word, but the mail carrier did, and Rodney was gratified to notice that he was as careful to conceal Dick's identity as he was that of his other passenger.

"Come on, you Moses," said he, "and remember that you are deaf, dumb, and blind. You, Jonas, get on your horse and clear yourself."

It would have done no good to prolong the leave-taking, and Rodney was glad to have it broken off so abruptly. He gave his friend's hand a final squeeze and shake, and when he came into the road again a moment later,

riding one horse and leading the other, there was no one in sight.

The way home was a long and lonely one to Rodney Gray, who felt as if the last tie that bound him to his school days had been sundered forever. He got through without any trouble, although he met some inquisitive people who wanted to know how he happened to have a riderless horse with him, passed one night at his father's house, and in due time was back in his old quarters on the upper plantation, where he had spent so many pleasant hours with the absent Dick. But before he had leisure to look about and tell himself how very lonesome he was, he had visitors, one of whom threw him into a terrible state of mind before he left. They were a squad of the —th Michigan boys, and commanded by the corporal who had once taken him prisoner, and whose name he had never heard. They good-naturedly demanded all the weapons he had, and threatened to go through his house if he didn't trot them right out; but when they went to the well for water the corporal drew off on one side, intimating by a look

that he had something to say to Rodney in private.

“Where’s your partner?” were the first words he said when they were alone.

“Gone over the river,” answered Rodney.

“How long since?”

“He went night before last.”

“Well, I’ll bet you a hard-tack he didn’t make it. Some of your good friends were the means of stopping him. You see,” he went on, without giving the astonished Rodney time to speak, “Ben and another boy, who were in my party when you and Griffin did so much for us, scouted down Randolph’s way a few days after the fight, and that Home Guard— You made a big blunder when you stuck to us till we let him go. Now he’s gone back on you.”

“What has he done?” inquired Rodney, who told himself that that was just what he expected from Tom Randolph.

“Why, Ben distinctly heard him tell one of our officers that a bearer of despatches would go from Mooreville in a few days, intending to cross the river at Baton Rouge, where he had

friends to help him," said the corporal. "Of course the matter was reported at headquarters, and the houses of all the Secession sympathizers in the city were watched closer than ever."

"Was Mr. Martin's house watched, do you know?"

"Why, certainly. He is always watched, and we had him under arrest during the fight."

"And I was simple enough to tell the provost marshal that that house would be my stopping-place as often as I came to the city," groaned Rodney.

"You needn't blame yourself for that, for I don't suppose it made a particle of difference," said the corporal soothingly. "The provost marshal would have found it out sooner or later, because it is a part of his business to find out where every stranger lives, and what he does while inside the lines. If you went there with your friend Graham——"

"I did," whispered Rodney. "And we went from there up to—up to——"

"Henderson's? Well, he's watched, too; and if one is caught the other will be."

“If Tom Randolph has got Dick Graham into trouble I will see that he is well punished for it,” said Rodney angrily.

“If he hasn’t, it isn’t because he didn’t try. If you say the word, I will go straight to his house and arrest him for a Home Guard.”

“No, no; don’t do that. I am not coward enough to take revenge on him in that way. But since he has made his boast that he is willing to die for the South, I will see that he has all the chance he wants.”

“Well, my boys seem to have had their fill of water, so we’ll jog along,” said the corporal. “If the Home Guards bother you let us know, and we’ll clean them out to the last man. Good-by.”

Astonished at the extent of the corporal’s information, and wondering how it was possible for any Southern sympathizer to live in Baton Rouge when he knew that he was so closely watched, Rodney went into the house as soon as the soldiers rode away, and sat down to write a letter. As a general thing his thoughts came rapidly and it was no trouble for him to put them on paper; but this par-

ticular letter seemed to bother him, for he made three copies of it before he got it to suit him. Then he ordered his horse brought to the door, changed his working clothes for a business suit, and galloped off in the direction of Mooreville. He stopped at his home "just long enough to let his mother see that he was all right" and then rode on again, but not toward Mooreville or the river. There was no one at either place whom he wanted to see that day, but he did want to have a few earnest words with General Ruggles, if he could find him. During the fight the general commanded the Confederate column that came from Camp Pinckney, and there was where Rodney hoped to find him now. Before he had ridden a dozen miles into the country he ran into a small party of rebels, who looked at his discharge, and encouraged him by saying that the officer he desired to see commanded the camp, and was recruiting men as rapidly as he could for some special service that was to be performed up about Holly Springs.

"I know by experience that special service usually means dangerous service," thought

Rodney, as he rode on his way. "If Tom Randolph really wants to do something for the South, he will jump at the chance of going to Holly Springs."

Camp Pinckney looked just as it did when he and Dick Graham ran the guard there on their way home, only there were more men who were being made into soldiers, and the number was being increased every day by the disconsolate and homesick conscripts who were sent there from all the districts in that part of the State. Rodney was shown at once into the presence of the commander, and knew, before he had exchanged a dozen words with him, that he would have no use for the letter he had taken so much pains to write.

"I can attend to the business myself without any aid from the Governor," said General Ruggles, who looked more like a hard-working farmer than he did like a brave and skilful soldier. "The slipshod manner in which recruiting has been done in this district is enough to make one forget the third commandment. There hasn't been a single man sent to this camp from your neighborhood."

“I am aware of it, sir. But as these men belong to the State and not to the Confederacy, I thought perhaps——”

“There’s no need of it, sir,” interrupted the general. “I have all the authority I want, and can do the business without saying a word to the Governor. Sent in his resignation, has he? Captain—Thomas—Randolph,” he continued, writing the name on a slip of paper. “And it has not yet been accepted? And how many men do you think he has in his company? All right. You go home and say nothing to anybody, and I will put him where he will meet something besides unarmed men and women and children.”

His business having been transacted to his entire satisfaction, Rodney was in no particular haste to go home. He made friends with one of the veterans who composed the camp guard, ate supper with him, and slept under half his blanket that night; but the morning’s sun saw him well on his return journey. He made a wide circuit to avoid passing through Mooreville, and did not go near his father’s house for fear it might be remembered against him at

some future time. He went home as rapidly as he could go, unsaddled his horse and turned him into the stable-yard, and went into the house; and there, seated in Rodney's favorite rocking chair, with his feet upon the back of another and a book in his hand, was—Dick Graham.

“You've got cheek! Why didn't you come out when you heard me at the bars?” exclaimed Rodney, as soon as he found his tongue.

“Because I thought you would prefer to come in and find me,” replied Dick; and then he dropped his book and jumped to his feet, and the two embraced each other schoolboy fashion.

“O Dick, you don't know how I have worried about you,” said Rodney. “And Tom Randolph was at the bottom of it all. You would have been watched if he hadn't said a word; but what I mean is that he made matters worse. I have paid him for it, however. Now tell me all about it.”

“We didn't succeed, and that's all there is to tell,” answered Dick. “We made six at-

tempts on two different nights, and once got so near to the other shore that I was sure we would make it ; but the picket boats from the fleet showed up, and we had to dig out. They were on hand every time, and you ought to have heard Henderson cuss. He declared that one or the other of his passengers was a Jonah, and he had a notion to chuck us both overboard so as to be sure he got the right one."

"It was you, Dick. Who was the other passenger?"

"I don't know any more about him now than I did when I first saw him. When we gave up trying on the first night and went back to the house, he shut himself in his room, and I never saw him till we went out on the second night to try it over again. No doubt he was a high-up officer with important papers in his pockets."

"Of course the picket boats opened fire on you."

"Of course they didn't, for we saw or heard them in time to dodge out of their way. One of them passed so close to us that we could see, dark as it was, that she pulled six oars on

a side. If she'd seen us or heard us breathe, she would have had us sure."

"Go on. What did you do on the night I left you?"

"Nothing. We walked about a mile to where a little bay made into the bank from the river, and there we found a skiff with piles of something in the bow and stern that I took to be the precious mail-bags which Mr. Martin said Henderson was going to pick up. When we got in there was barely room for Henderson to work the oars, and I didn't wonder that he growled so about taking me over."

"How did you come home?"

"Well, when we came back after making the sixth attempt, and Henderson got mad and told me to clear out and never let him put eyes on me again (I noticed that he didn't say a word to the other fellow, and that's what makes me think that he was an officer whom Henderson had to take whether he wanted to or not), I took him at his word and put for Mr. Turnbull's. That gentleman was kind enough to hitch up a team and take me to your father's, and your father brought me

here, to find you gone. You've been gone three nights, and I want to know what you mean by such work."

"I've been to Camp Pinckney to make arrangements for Tom Randolph and his Home Guards to go into the army," replied Rodney, adding that he had written to the Governor, laying the blame for the bombardment of Baton Rouge upon the shoulders of the Home Guards, and giving such other incidents in their history as he thought would attract the attention of the authorities and induce them to do something; but General Ruggles had promised to attend to the matter himself.

"Of course Captain Randolph will be very much obliged to you when he hears of it," observed Dick.

"He has nobody to thank but himself, and since I have heard what those escaped prisoners had to say about Home Guards, I wish every one of them could be forced into the army. Now you've got to stay with me until the war is ended one way or the other, haven't you?"

“Not much. I’m going up to Port Hudson to try it again, if you will show me the way; and you ought to have heard Henderson rip and snort because I didn’t go there in the first place without troubling him. But you see I didn’t know that I could, and you didn’t either. If I can take a boat from Port Hudson up Red River to Alexandria, or better yet, up Black River to Monroe, I shall save miles of horseback travel.”

“And run the risk of being captured by gunboats every step of the way,” added Rodney. “But I suppose I’ll have to go.”

And he did the very next morning. This time there was no trouble about it, for when the steamer *New Era*, which was regularly employed in bringing army supplies from the Red River country, moved out from her landing at Port Hudson bound for Monroe, she carried Dick Graham with her. The night was as dark as a pocket, but the lonely Rodney kept watch on the bank as long as a single spark could be seen coming out of her smokestacks, and even lingered about the place for two or three days, almost hoping

that some Union gunboat would send a shot across her bows and drive her back; but when the soldiers assured him that she must have gone through safely or else she would have returned within a few hours of her departure, he realized that the long delayed separation had come at last, and turned his face sorrowfully homeward.

He went directly to his father's house to report the success of his undertaking, and learned that Mooreville had been thrown into a state of great excitement during his absence. No one had seen or heard of Captain Roach since Breckenridge made his fruitless attempt to take the city, but his office was occupied by a grizzly veteran, who hardly gave himself time to sit down in Captain Roach's chair before declaring that he hadn't come there to stand nonsense from anybody, and that everyone liable to military duty, Home Guards and all, must make tracks for Camp Pinckney or be dragged there by the neck. It didn't make the least difference to him how they went, but they must go; they might be sure of that. He brought fifty veterans with him

to back him up, and in less than twenty-four hours after taking possession of the office, sent off forty-five conscripts, two-thirds of whom were Home Guards.

“Mrs. Randolph tried the same game with Major Morgan, that’s the new man’s name, that she tried with so much success with Captain Roach,” said Mr. Gray with a laugh. “But it didn’t work. The major sent back word that he had no time to go about visiting and eating dinners, and Tom was given his choice between reporting at the camp voluntarily or being sent there under guard. It’s the best thing that was ever done for this community.”

Rodney wanted to shout, but instead of doing that he got on his horse and rode down to call on Major Morgan. He didn’t find the office filled with loafers, as it had been in Captain Roach’s time, but there were a few bronzed fellows standing about who remembered seeing Rodney at the camp, and bowed to him as he came in. The major remembered him too, and said, as he gave the boy’s hand one short, quick

jerk, that was doubtless intended for a shake :

“There’s material enough here to form the finest kind of a battalion. Why don’t you apply for a commission and go out with it? You’ve had rest enough by this time.”

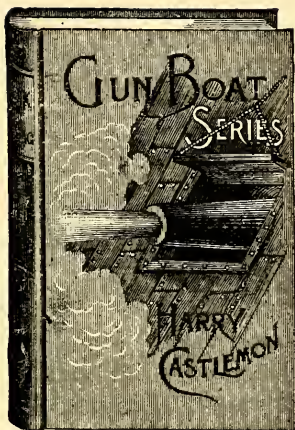
“Because I don’t wish to command conscripts,” replied Rodney, ignoring the fact that half the soldiers in the Confederate armies were conscripts and nothing else, being held to service against their will. “Besides, I am an overseer now, and I like it better than fighting.”

But Rodney could not keep out of trouble as easily as he kept out of the army, nor did Major Morgan succeed in sending all Tom Randolph’s Home Guards to Camp Pinckney. Some of them, Lieutenants Lambert and Moseley among the rest, took to the woods, and became freebooters to all intents and purposes. Whether these worthies knew or suspected that he had a hand in the breaking up of their organization Rodney never learned ; but he was quickly made aware that they did not intend he should see a moment’s peace if they

could help it. They either found the cotton of which we have spoken, or else somebody put them on the track of it; and the efforts they made to destroy it, as well as the counter efforts made by Rodney Gray and his two Union cousins to protect it, shall be described in the concluding volume of this series, which will be entitled "SAILOR JACK, THE TRADER."

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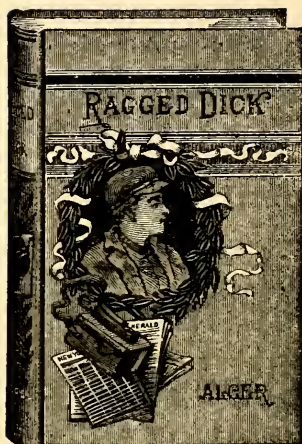
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